

Iraqi opposition divided over call for meeting

AMMAN (AFP) — The Iraqi opposition is divided over a call by Jordan to meet for talks on the future of Iraq, a Shiite Muslim opposition group said Saturday. Bayan Jabr of the Supreme Assembly of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SAIRI) said in a statement that the call was "vague and confused." King Hussein on Friday called for the Iraqi opposition to open talks "before it is too late" to avoid bloodshed in their country, and said Jordan was ready to support them. Jordan has said previously it would be prepared to host a meeting of opposition groups in exile. Mr. Jabr, SAIRI's representative in Syria, said the Iraqi National Congress (INC), an umbrella of opposition groups, favoured a meeting in Amman. But Islamic, democratic and other opposition groups insist that a preparatory meeting be held first to avoid the INC dominating any forum. Mr. Jabr said, meanwhile, a third grouping of Arab nationalist rejects out of hand a gathering in Jordan. Meanwhile, Iraq's ambassador to Geneva and a half-brother of President Saddam, Barzan Takriti, said Jordan's proposal to host an opposition meeting was "irritating."

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Hamas leader urges boycott of polls

JENIN, West Bank (R) — A leader of the militant Islamic group Hamas, addressing a rally in the Palestinian-ruled Jenin refugee camp on Saturday, called for a boycott of the first Palestinian elections next month. About 3,000 Palestinians attended the rally, marking the eighth anniversary of the establishment of Hamas, which views as a sell-out the 1993 self-rule deal between the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) and Israel. "You must boycott the elections of the administrative council whose main task will be to recognise Israel and its continued occupation of Palestinian territories," said Sheikh Jamal Mansour, a leading Hamas figure in the West Bank. In talks in Cairo this week, the PLO failed to persuade Hamas to take part in elections for an 83-member council scheduled to be held in the West Bank and Gaza Jan. 20. Jenin is one of six West Bank towns handed by Israel to the PLO under the Palestinian self-rule accord. Self-rule began in the West Bank town of Jericho and Gaza last year.

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King: Jordan not seeking to impose any solution on Iraqis

AMMAN — His Majesty King Hussein has reiterated rejection of criticism that he was trying to impose his views on the Iraqi opposition concerning the future of Iraq and said Jordan was working to remove sources of tension in relations with Syria.

"Jordan does not want to impose its opinions on the various opposition factions, but wants to support them as they choose a path that will preserve the unity of Iraq," the King told the Qatari daily Al Watan in an interview published yesterday.

The monarch reaffirmed that he had no personal designs on Iraq and stressed that the idea of a federation for the post-Saddam era was only one of the possible options that the Iraqis might consider for the future.

In the wide ranging interview which was conducted by the newspaper's editor in chief in Amman last week, the King also said that Jordan was not competing with Egypt over political influence in the region nor was there a deterioration in relations with Iran following the expulsion of the embassy's third secretary from Amman earlier this month.

The King revealed in the interview that "with regard to the rockets shipment, it was not a simple matter. The United Nations and the concerned authorities contacted us to alert us that inter-continental ballistic missiles and not a shipment of ordn-

ary rockets was on its way to Baghdad via Amman estimating its cost at \$25 million. Tell me what can I do in this situation? Is it reasonable for me to overlook this serious question?"

As far as the proposal for a confederation with the Palestinians was concerned, "the project is still on the cards," the King said, although any decision on it would have to wait until the Palestinian people were able to have their own say on this issue.

On the detention, pending trial of former Islamist Deputy Laith Shbeilat, the King said that the case was a "legal" one and not a "political" matter. "As far as a pardon is concerned," the King said, "all I can tell you is that we will see what the days have in store for us."

Following are major excerpts from the interview in a question-answer form:

A: I would like to start the interview with a question about Qatari-Jordanian relations. You were the first Arab leader to bless the new regime in Qatar under Sheikh Hamad Ben Khalifeh Al Thani. What were your main reasons for this earlier support?

A: Every body realises that our relations with Qatar are old and deep-rooted. I consider Qatar's people as my kinsmen and for this reason I supported the young leadership of Qatar based on my own knowledge of Sheikh

Hamad's character and his pan-Arab stand hoping that his rule would mark a new era in Qatar. What motivated me to declare my early support is a desire to help prevent any exploitation of the situation on the part of their parties.

Q: How do you view what came to be known as the crisis at the Muscat Gulf summit and the appointment of a new secretary general for the Gulf Cooperation Council? How do you think this crisis can be solved?

A: I don't find a problem in this and I am confident that our brothers are able to overcome this simple difference and further bolster relations among the Gulf countries.

Q: In your call to the Iraqi opposition to meet in Amman, don't you think that it constitutes an interference in Iraq's internal affairs?

A: I believe that the cause of the tragedy in Iraq stems from the policies followed by the Iraqi leadership.

We have reached a point in which we feel that Iraq is threatened with division and partition and loss and that our brothers have reached a degree of suffering that can no more be tolerated and that brothers' duty requires that a brother should support and save his brother.

Regrettably we have found that the Iraqi leadership has lost all its credibility by admitting violations which it had earlier denied. This was a bad omen that motivated the

perpetuation of the sufferings of the Iraqi people.

In addition to the mass destruction weapons we find that the human rights issue has become one of the topics on the world community agenda. What I mean to say is that the human rights issue is of concern to the whole world and not an interference in internal affairs of others. My call for the various Iraqi factions to meet was a strong and clear message to the Iraqi people to transcend the errors of the past and avert other more serious complications.

Q: But you have called for a federation that encompasses the Shiites, the Sunnis and the Kurds which prompted people to charge that your proposal means the partitioning of Iraq, can you clarify?

A: What I have said exactly is that one of the options for saving Iraq was a federation. I had in mind the federations in Germany, the United States which are major world powers.

By federation I did not mean partitioning of Iraq. On the contrary I meant to allow each party to acquire its own rights and to close the rifts which has caused us all so much suffering.

Q: We have noticed that you have been talking about a Jordanian attempt to gather the Iraqi parties. Do we understand from this that the authorities in Baghdad are concerned with this invita-

tion?

A: This is possible. We are calling for reconciliation in Iraq among all parties without naming them.

Q: Do we understand that this Jordanian effort means also a sort of mediation between Iraq and the other parties?

A: This is not what I meant because mediation can be conducted when a mediator's advice is heeded. But I did not find this happening since 1990.

Q: In a recent lecture in Paris journalists Mohammad Hassanein Haikal said he expected monarchy to be restored to Iraq through a member of the Hashemite family. We want to know the truth as you are directly concerned with this issue?

A: I have said time and again that I have no personal ambition in Iraq. I am a believer in God and life after death. I believe that my duty is to transcend the question of persons in order to save a whole nation from tragedy.

Q: Your Majesty, some people believe that your policies deepen the wounds of the Iraqi people citing your giving safe haven to dissident Hussein Kamel and the rockets shipment found in the airport. What do you say to this?

A: This simply means further demonstrating the extent of the Iraqi suffering ...

(Continued on page 7)



PLO leader Yasser Arafat (right) salutes the Nativity in Bethlehem Saturday (Reuters photo)

Assad urges full speed in peace process

CAIRO (Agencies) — Syrian President Hafez Assad, speaking in public for the first time since Syria agreed to resume talks with Israel, said on Saturday that his country favoured speeding up the peace process with "no preconditions."

At a joint news conference after talks in Cairo with President Hosni Mubarak, he said Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres had also shown signs of greater flexibility. "I believe that Peres wants to deal with more openness ... this is what the Americans told us and this is what we concluded from his statements," he said.

"The two sides agreed to resume talks without preconditions. In our talks with the American peace shuttle we did not define an agenda," Mr. Assad said. "When they meet they will discuss setting the topics of

discussion." Mr. Assad said, refusing to predict the outcome of the talks.

Syria agreed to resume the talks last Saturday after a meeting between Mr. Assad and U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher. The next round will be in Maryland next Wednesday.

The resumption, after a six-month break, has generated widespread optimism that Syria might start to catch up with the Jordanians and Palestinians, who already have agreements with Israel. But Mr. Assad was non-committal about the prospects.

"It is difficult to predict specific matters. There is an agreement to resume talks and that they (the Syrian and Israeli negotiators) should explore the prospects for an agreement, but there is nothing specific," he said. Pressed on what had per-

suaded Syria to resume the talks, he said that his meeting with Mr. Christopher "confirmed circumstances."

"But nobody discussed with me any specific issue. There is nothing specific. There are some general ideas and general concepts, the aim of which is to accelerate the peace process, and Syria supports this," he added.

The Syrian president, whose country stayed away from the talks because of Israel's demand for early warning stations on the Golan Heights, showed no signs of changing policy on the stations or on full Israeli withdrawal from the Golan, captured from Syria in the 1967 war.

On the stations, he said: "We (Syria and Israel) agreed from the beginning that any measures related to peace should not infringe on the sovereignty of the other

party." "Withdrawal from the territory (the Golan) is an issue decided by the U.N.

Security Council and in the U.S. initiative and the peace process." (Continued on page 3)

Lebanon to negotiate separately with Israel

BEIRUT (AFP) — Lebanon said on Saturday it would negotiate a separate peace deal with Israel but would only sign the document when an overall agreement had been reached with Syria.

Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri said his country's negotiations with Israel would be based on Israel's withdrawal from its self-declared "security zone" in southern Lebanon. "The signing of peace will be simultaneous," so that neither Syria nor Lebanon will be "isolated," Mr. Hariri added.

The statement comes after Israeli suggestions that Syria maintain its sizeable influence over Lebanon, where it has stationed 40,000 troops. Mr. Hariri said he was "confident about Lebanon's future."

"Lebanon can count, not only on Syria, but also on all the other Arab states and its friendly international relations, which are based, like Syria, on the sovereignty and independence," Mr. Hariri said.

Lively debate fails to define healthy relationship between government, press

By Sa'eda Kilani

Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — As Minister of Justice Hisham Al Tal sought, in a debate on Saturday, to support the government's claims for more restrictions on the press, former Minister of Information Ibrahim Izzedine was quick to pinpoint the negative implications of curbing press freedoms currently enjoyed under the 1993 press law and their impact on the country's image and reputation.

In the debate that was organised by the Centre for Strategic Studies at the University of Jordan to discuss the performance of the Jordanian media since the democratisation began in 1989, no agreement was reached by the key speakers on what should be done to create a happy medium, or a "healthy environment" between the government and the press.

Following His Majesty King Hussein's celebrated

speech last month, in which he criticised the performance of state-owned and private media, the government has intended to draft new amendments to the press and publications law of 1993 which could restore to the government the right to close down newspapers or reject licences to new ones.

"There should be more restrictions," insisted Mr. Tal during the exchange which was attended by officials, opposition figures, chief editors of daily and weekly newspapers and other journalists. "If a newspaper is about to publish (information) that would infringe upon national security, then it should be confiscated. If a violation is repeated, the judiciary should have the power to close down the (publication)."

"The state owes the people (their right to see) a crime prevented before it happens," he added. Mr. Izzedine, however,

believed that the government should not have the power to close down newspapers or reject their licences. He said that the judiciary should be the final arbiter and fines should be the penalty in violations of the law by the press generally.

"Let us abide by the rule of the law. Let this (democratic) experiment be given a chance," he said.

"For more than half a century (1921-1993), (freedom) of the press was restricted. It was the executive authority that determined its ceiling."

Mr. Izzedine's arguments, which he said were based on the constitution, the laws and Jordan's national interests, focused on the need for more freedoms that consolidate the Kingdom's moves towards full democratisation of its political system. Mr. Tal, on the other hand, warned against the recurrence of Jordan's short-lived democratic experiment in the

1950's.

"Didn't we have press that crossed the red lines in 1953?" Mr. Tal asked. "Didn't the same story re-occur after 1967? I believe in the need to have a higher council for the press which has the powers to grant, withdraw licences (from publications) if required by the law." Mr. Tal said that he still did not have all the answers as to how this council might be constituted.

Mr. Tal's arguments were strongly dismissed by Mr. Izzedine who perceived the circumstances of the 1953 experience as completely different in form and context from those of 1989 when democracy was re-introduced in the Kingdom.


"That (earlier) stage is over," Mr. Izzedine replied. "We have a National Charter now, and there is a social contract between the people and the leadership that has been reflected in our laws. Everyone is oper-

ating within the limits of these laws. The (1953) experience is something that happened in the past. We all benefited from its experience but we could not consider it as some event that might recur."

"The government (in cooperation) with the parliament can do anything," he continued. But "let us leave it to the judiciary to govern the work of the journalism profession. There might be some violations and there might be lack of professionalism, it is true, but the government has to understand the nature of the press. It can do what it wants, but we cannot say that its actions (of imposing restrictions) come in the framework of enhancing freedoms and liberties."

Mr. Izzedine agreed with the minister on the need for the establishment of a higher council for the press but said it should be a council

(Continued on page 3)



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هنا عندنا اتصل

Turks elect new government today

ISTANBUL (R) — Turks go to the polls on Sunday in parliamentary elections that pits Western-oriented conservative and social democratic parties against a pro-Islamic party favouring stronger ties with Turkey's Muslim neighbours.

Some 34 million voters will choose among 12 parties who have put forward candidates for the 550-seat parliament in early general elections called after Prime Minister Tansu Ciller's right-left coalition collapsed in September.

People in 83 electoral regions will cast ballots between 0700-1600 (0500-1400 GMT). In 32 eastern and southeastern provinces the polls will be open from 0600-1500 (0400-1300 GMT).

Voting is compulsory, with non-voters fined 250,000 TL (\$4). People vote for a party rather than specific candidates, unless they cast ballots for one of the 165 indepen-

dent candidates.

Although no party is expected to get a clear majority, the vote is widely seen by analysts as a referendum on whether Turks want to strengthen economic and defence ties with the West or replace these ties with Islamic-oriented policies.

"Voters will make a choice for a Middle Eastern country that proposes turning its back to the West or uniting with the West," the mainstream daily Hurriyet newspaper wrote on Saturday.

The vote will be taken as a sign of the strength of the pro-Islamic Welfare Party (RP) — which in 1994 local polls won Istanbul, Ankara and other cities — but analysts say the likelihood of a coalition means Turkey's pro-Western policies will continue.

Still, they are concerned that whatever coalition arises out of Sunday's voting will

remain as fractious as the four-year coalition between Ms. Ciller's conservative True Path Party (DYP) and the social democrats, when infighting held up some of the promised economic and democratic reforms.

Polls published in the leading newspapers have consistently shown Ms. Ciller's party trailing rival conservative Motherland Party (ANAP) and the pro-Islamic party.

The two democratic parties, including Ms. Ciller's former partner the Republican People's Party, are generally seen as coming in fourth and fifth.

Although industrialists and others have called for a DYP-ANAP conservative coalition, the bitter rivalry between Ms. Ciller and ANAP leader Mesut Yilmaz makes this unlikely.

Because parties need to gather 10 per cent of the

national vote cast to qualify for parliament, minor ultra-leftist and rightist parties are expected to stay on the sidelines.

The threshold also may leave the Kurdish People's Democracy Party (HADEP) out of parliament, despite expectations it will sweep the mainly Kurdish southeast, where voters say they want a negotiated solution to the 11-year separatist Kurdish war.

Some analysts have said that if HADEP does not qualify for seats, this will make it that more difficult for Ankara to address Kurdish demands for cultural and political freedoms.

But with annual inflation around 80 per cent, unofficial unemployment at 15 per cent and privatisation stumbling, most Turks appear concerned with the future of the economy.

Campaigning, however,

was marked by more mudslinging than specific policy promises.

Ms. Ciller, in a televised speech on Friday night, spent most of her time accusing ANAP rival Yilmaz of working hand in hand with the Islamists to divide the country.

For his part Yilmaz, in newspaper ads that ran on Saturday, used pictures of Ms. Ciller's businessman husband Ozer Ciller to remind voters of never-proven claims of financial impropriety.

Political columnists on Saturday begged Turks to go to the polls, some because it could halt the rise of the Islamic Party, and others because the vote would make clear people's views.

"Tomorrow's elections are important because then everybody will see the reality," Hasan Cemal wrote in the daily Sabah.



SUHA ARAFAT HOLDS ZAHWA: Suha Arafat, wife of Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) Chairman Yasser Arafat, holds her four-month-old baby girl Zahwa while surrounded by security guards after her arrival in Bethlehem Friday. Suha, a Christian who converted to Islam when she married Arafat, is to attend the first Christmas festivities under Palestinian self-rule (Reuters photo)

Three civilians killed in Kabul rocket attack

KABUL (AFP) — Three civilians died in a fresh rocket attack on Kabul, bringing the total number of people killed by shelling this month to at least 52, hospital staff and witnesses said Saturday.

Twenty civilians have been killed in rocket and artillery barrages in the war-torn Afghan capital in the last two days alone, they added.

The latest victims died late Friday when rockets, which the government said were fired by the Taliban militia, struck a residential area in the south of the city, they said.

The three died in two separate strikes in the same part of the city, a suburb that was the scene of intense street to street fighting between warring factions earlier in the year.

Meanwhile, two fresh salvos of rockets and artillery shells hit the city on Friday and Saturday, but there were no civilian casualties although some of the 11 shells landed in residential areas, they added.

One house in a central area of the capital had its top floor blown off by two rockets late Friday, but its owner, who

was praying at the time, miraculously escaped almost unscathed, he said.

"I was doing my prayers when suddenly there was an incredible bang, followed by a rain of dust and masonry," he said.

"I can't believe I am still alive, God must have been listening to my prayers," he said.

The city has been the target of almost daily barrages and bombing raids since the Taliban arrived on its outskirts in mid-October, the defence ministry has said.

Egyptian Islamist gets 3-year prison sentence

CAIRO (AP) — A military court convicted a member of the Muslim Brotherhood on Saturday for receiving an anti-government message and failing to report it to authorities.

The conviction of Abdul Wahab Sharaf Eddin came three weeks after he was acquitted by a military judge of accusations he was in contact with a radical Islamic group intent on overthrowing the government.

The court sentenced him to three years in prison. In the latest case, Sharaf Eddin was charged with failing to inform authorities that he had received a statement urging violence against the government on his shipping company's fax machine in the Red Sea port of Suez.

On Nov. 30, Sharaf Eddin was acquitted of plotting anti-government activity with an extremist group and belonging to an illegal organisation. Two others were convicted of trying to overthrow the government and sentenced to 15 years in prison.

Sharaf Eddin's lawyers said he was targeted by the police because he is a prominent Islamic activist in Suez.

Although the Muslim Brotherhood is technically illegal, its members had been allowed to operate openly since the 1970s. But earlier this year, the government of President Hosni Mubarak accused the group of collaboration with violent extremists and began cracking down on its members.

A military court on Nov. 23 convicted 54 members of the Brotherhood for involvement in non-violent political activities. Security officials also broke up a number of Brotherhood rallies and other gatherings in advance of Dec. 6 parliament elections.

Muslim radicals launched a campaign of violence in the spring of 1992 to try to overthrow Egypt's secular government and replace it with Islamic rule. Some 850 people have died, most of them police or suspected militants.

The government's use of military courts to hear cases involving militants has been widely criticised by human rights groups because there is no right of appeal. The government says it is necessary because civil courts are too overcrowded to provide speedy trials.

Lonely hearts column brings marriage by the coupon in Gulf

DUBAI (AFP) — The lonely hearts column has arrived in Saudi Arabia, where the authorities are urging people to marry as a religious duty to halt a sharp rise in the number of single women and divorcees.

A column in the weekly newspaper Al-Muslimin is attracting hundreds of men and women seeking Islamic marriage by cut-out coupon and offering men the opportunity to take a second, third or even fourth wife.

Among the clientele are "a Saudi man, 71, father-of-five, retired teacher, seeking a virtuous virgin of 30 summers and offering independent accommodation."

The family of a 28-old Moroccan graduate is less demanding, saying it would accept "a married man, even handicapped, provided he is virtuous and fair."

In another advert an Egyptian teacher, 42, who made his fortune in the Gulf, says he is on bad terms with his wife and intends to divorce her for a virgin. He offers a five-storey apartment block in Cairo to his new bride.

The paper says it has united dozens of couples, most from Saudi Arabia, Morocco or Egypt, since it launched the column in September with a ground-breaking advert offering the new service in the conservative kingdom.

"Saudi woman, 30, university assistant. Her family hopes to marry her to a virtuous Saudi man, aged 50 or more. Doesn't matter if he is widower, divorced or polygamist. Consent of wife required," it read.

The adverts appear on a page entitled "Half of Religion" because Islam teaches that marriage accomplishes half a believer's religious duty by leading to procreation and an increase in the number of the faithful.

Under Islam, a man can marry up to four wives as long as he treats them all equally.

The lonely hearts column is not, however, the first attempt to update the services of the traditional matchmaker: Mohammad Khalaf Al Rashid, a Riyadh businessman, claims to

have brought together 320 couples with his computerised marriage agency since 1992.

"I log the information about each person onto the computer and using this information bank I help them choose by matching their demands and social conditions," he told the Saudi daily Al-Iqtisadiya.

"Then, I help to organise a meeting between the partners, with the agreement and in the presence of the parents of each person, in line with Sharia (Islamic law)."

His initiative has received official backing from the governor of Riyadh province, Prince Salman Ibn Abdul Aziz, and the grand mufti of the kingdom, Sheikh Abdul Aziz Ibn Baaz, according to the paper.

The official Saudi press, like those in other Gulf Arab monarchies, has repeatedly raised the alarm about a rise in the number of single women and divorcees.

Between 25 and 30 divorce cases are registered every day in Riyadh, the Arabic daily Al-Sharq Al-Awsat reported.

In Kuwait, where social problems have been aggravated by the effects of Iraq's occupation of the emirate between August 1990 and February 1991, one marriage in four ends in divorce, according to Haya Mughanma, a Kuwaiti sociologist.

In the United Arab Emirates the situation is worse: studies by the labour ministry and police in Dubai have said that more than half the marriages each year finish in divorce.

The young, however, are sceptical of official attempts to encourage them to marry. Myriam, 27, a civil servant in the UAE, told AFP she would prefer to know her partner properly and insisted that newspaper adverts often gave false information.

Sahar, a student, took a more radical approach that is becoming increasingly popular despite discouragement from Saudi religious leaders. "I would prefer to continue my studies, even if it means I stay single," she said.

Writers slam Kuwaitis urging Bahrain reforms

KUWAIT (R) — Kuwaiti newspapers on Saturday said a letter sent by Kuwaiti politicians and academics to Bahrain urging the restoration of parliament and freedom for political prisoners was an interference in domestic affairs.

"Regardless of the intentions that drove some persons to sign that letter, this matter is unjustifiable and a mistake they should not have committed," Al-Anba newspaper said.

"We would like to ask them if they would accept that some people in a Gulf, Arab or Islamic state sign a letter about the most private of our internal affairs and send it to Kuwaiti officials?" it said in an editorial. "No doubt their answer will be an absolute no."

In a letter to Emir Sheikh Isa Bin Sulman Al Khalifa, about 100 Kuwaiti activists urged the "restoration of constitutional legitimacy and... freedom of political participation."

They said they were motivated by care for the "stabil-

ity" of Bahrain and the region, urging the emir to release political detainees and allow exiled opposition figures to return.

The 100 included Kuwaiti human rights activists, members of parliament, university professors and former ambassadors.

Bahrain's parliament was closed in 1975 and replaced in 1993 by an appointed 30-member consultative council.

At least 13 civilians and three policemen were killed and hundreds arrested in political unrest which erupted in Bahrain in December 1994. Protests calling for the restoration of parliament died down in April.

"Sorrowfully, four years after the liberation of Kuwait... we find among us people who interfere in the internal affairs of Bahrain," wrote columnist Ali Jaber Al Ali in Al-Sayassah daily.

Ali Ali cited gratitude to Bahrain for standing by Kuwait in the 1991 Gulf war which ended the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait as a reason to criticise the letter.

Wanted: Wife for Rabin's assassin

NEW YORK (R) — Weeks after setting up a telephone hotline to raise money for the legal defence of the man who assassinated Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, his New York supporters are trying to find him a wife.

"We are now implementing a marriage match and asking all eligible orthodox young ladies who may have an interest in marrying our great Jewish hero, Yigal Amir, to leave a brief message describing yourself," says a recording of a woman's voice at the same hot line number.

Legal student Amir, 25, confessed to shooting Mr. Rabin following a peace rally in Tel Aviv Nov. 4. His trial is scheduled to start next month. Mr. Amir said he killed Mr. Rabin to stop him handing land back to Arabs for peace.

Moshe Gross, the organiser of Mr. Amir's defence fund in New York, said the group had raised more than \$100,000 within two days of being established Nov. 8.

According to the new message, Mr. Amir is permitted under Israeli law to marry and have a family. Candidates are told they must be between 18 and 23 years old and "be physically and mentally healthy as well as highly idealistic. Selected candidates will be screened discreetly by our professional rabbinic panel. Only serious candidates need apply."

NEWS IN BRIEF

China opens Gaza representation office

GAZA CITY (AFP) — China on Saturday opened a representation office in the Palestinian autonomous Gaza Strip, officials said. Yasser Arafat, the president of the Palestinian Authority, met with the Chinese representative to the Palestinian government, Chang Chou Long, who presented letters of accreditation and a message from the Chinese prime minister. China is the 13th country to open a representation office in the Gaza Strip since Palestinian autonomy was established here in 1994 as part of the peace accord with Israel.

Iran holds military drills in Gulf

TEHRAN (AFP) — Iran's Revolutionary Guards began naval exercises in Gulf waters Saturday to improve coordination among various units of the elite force, the official IRNA news agency reported. The four-day manoeuvres, dubbed Naad (thunder), include several warships and missile-launching boats. They are taking place in Iran's territorial waters near the oil-rich Khark island in the northernmost part of the Gulf. The operation's commander, Colonel Parviz Ghosli, told IRNA that the first stage of the exercise involved the "successful" launch of short and long-range ground-to-air missiles at mock enemy forces. Iranian forces regularly stage manoeuvres in the Gulf and Oman Sea.

Italian being held by Aided

NAIROBI (AFP) — Kidnapped Italian agronomist Marco Lorenzetti is being held by militants of warlord General Mohammed Farah Aided in the southern Somali town of Baidoa, a reliable source said here Saturday. Lorenzetti, 35, works for Italian non-governmental organisation European Consortium for Agrarian Training (CEFA). He was kidnapped on Monday by unidentified gunmen near Gaba Zei, a village north of Mogadishu. It was not known what the kidnappers received in exchange for handing him over to Mr. Aided's militia. Mr. Aided set up his "government" last June, but it remains unrecognised. Somalia has been ruled by feuding warlords since the overthrow of dictator Mohammed Siad Barre in 1991. Mr. Aided's forces seized Baidoa during a lightning raid in September. U.N. troops withdrew last March following the warlords' failure to agree to a government of national unity. Most expatriate relief workers left just before the troops' departure.

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PROGRAMME TWO

14:00 Shelly Duvall's Bedtime Stories
14:30 Feature film: "The Dream Team"
16:00 The Adventures of the Black Stallion
16:30 Sky Trackers
17:00 Children's Programme — C'Est Pas Sorcier
17:30 Fruits Et Legumes
18:00 Doc — L'Integrale
19:00 News in French
19:15 Magazine — Sports Et Musique
19:30 News Headlines
19:35 Boogies Diner
20:00 Cinema, Cinema
20:25 The Bold and the Beautiful
21:00 The American Chart Show
22:00 News in English
22:25 Feature film: A Different Affair
23:00 Christmas mass from the Vatican
— live

PRAYER TIMES

05:05 Fajr
06:20 Sunrise (Shamsul Dhuha)
11:35 Dhuhur
14:19 'Asr
16:41 Maghreb
18:04 'Isha

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German-speaking Evangelical Congregation Tel. 845457
The Latter-Day Saints Tel. 654932
Church of Nazareth Tel. 675691
The Evangelical Local Church in Amman Tel. 811295

WEATHER

Bulletin supplied by the Department of Meteorology.

Temperatures will be around average with winds easterly moderate to active. In Aqaba, winds will be northerly moderate and seas calm.

JORDAN TIMES DAILY GUIDE AND CALENDAR

Min./Max. temp. 3/14
Amman 10/21
Aqaba 10/21
Deserts 1/16
Jordan Valley 10/22

Yesterday's high temperatures:
Amman 15, Aqaba 20. Humidity
readings: Amman 52 per cent.
Aqaba 45 per cent.

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

NIGHT DUTY

AMMAN:
Dr. Osama Al Hussaini 847289
Dr. Bilal Al Sayid 890280
Dr. Khalil Abu Marjoub 797977
Dr. Hisham Kan'an 790286
Firas pharmacy 661912
Fendous pharmacy 78336
Al Asena pharmacy 637025
Nairokh pharmacy 623672
Al Salati pharmacy 636730
Yacoub pharmacy 644945
Shamsani pharmacy 637660
Nairokh pharmacy 623672
Najib pharmacy 847632

IRBID:
Dr. Ahmad Qanu 281741
Alquds pharmacy (—)

ZARQA:
Dr. Randa Shaban 995710
Khalifah pharmacy 985417

EMERGENCIES

Food Control Centre 637111
Civil Defence Department 661111
Blood Bank 75121
Rescue 630341
Civil Defence Emergency 199
Rescue Police 192, 621111, 637777
Fire Brigade 67101
Blood Bank 607071
Highway Police 843402
Traffic Police 896390
Public Security Department 63021
Price Complaints 605800
Water and Sewerage 661176
Complaints 897467
Amman Municipality 787111
Telephone Information (directory assistance) 121
Overseas Calls 010230
Central Amman Telephone Repairs 623101
Abdali Telephone Repairs 661101
Jordan Television 773111
Radio Jordan 774111
Water Authority 680100
Jordan Electricity Authority 815615
Electric Power Company 636381

RJ Flight Information 08-53200
Queen Alia Intl. Airport 08-53200

HOSPITALS

AMMAN:
Hussein Medical Centre 813813/32
Khalifah Medical, J. Amn 642816
Akileh Maternity, J. Amn. 642441/2
Jabal Amman Maternity 642362
Malhas, J. Amman 636140
Palestine, Shamsani 607071
Shamsani Hospital 669131
University Hospital 845845
Al-Muhsen Hospital 667227/9
The Islamic, Abdali 666127/57
Al-Ahli, Abdali 664164/6
Italian, Al-Mulajneen 771101/3
Al-Bashir, J. Ashrafiah 775111/26
Army, Marka 891611/15
Queen Alia Hospital 602240/50
Amal Hospital 607155
ZARQA:
Zarqa Govt. Hospital (09)983323
Zarqa National Hospital (09)900560
Ibn Sina Hospital (09)986732
Al Hilala Modern Hospital (09)909990
The Arab Centre for Heart and Spinal Surgery 861199
IRBID:
Princess Basma Hospital (02)775555
Greek Catholic Hospital (02)72275
Ibn Al Nafes Hospital (02)347100

AQABA:
Princess Haya Hospital (03)314111

FOR THE TRAVELLER

QUEEN ALIA INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

This information is supplied by Royal Jordanian (RJ) information department at the Queen Alia International Airport Tel. (06)53200-5, where it should always be verified.

ARRIVALS

Royal Jordanian (RJ) Flights (Terminal 1)
05:30 Aqaba (RJ)
06:15 Beirut (RJ)
08:50 Frankfurt (RJ)
11:00 Vienna (RJ)
11:10 Jeddah (RJ)
11:25 Tunis, Casablanca (RJ)
12:15 Athens (RJ)
16:00 Jeddah (add)
20:10 Cairo (RJ)
20:15 Abu Dhabi, Dubai (RJ)
20:20 Athens (RJ)
20:35 Jeddah (RJ)
20:45 Damascus (RJ)
21:10 New Delhi (RJ)

18:45 Frankfurt (RJ)
19:25 Rome (RJ)
19:52 Vienna (RJ)
21:00 Jeddah (add) (RJ)
22:15 Munich, Rome (RJ)
22:45 Aqaba (RJ)
06:10 Cairo (RJ)
06:50 Sanaa (add) (RJ)

22:05 Singapore, Jakarta (RJ)
22:10 New Delhi, Singapore (RJ)
22:40 Bangkok (RJ)
23:45 Sanaa (RJ)
Jeddah (add)

Other Flights (Terminal 2)

04:00 Rome (AZ)
07:45 Beirut (ME)
11:30 Sanaa (YF)
13:30 Doha (GF)
15:00 Doha (GF)
16:05 Moscow (SU)
21:10 Cairo (MS)
02:35 Amsterdam (KL)

DEPARTURES

Royal Jordanian (RJ) Flights (Terminal 1)

05:30 Aqaba (RJ)
06:15 Beirut (RJ)
08:50 Frankfurt (RJ)
11:00 Vienna (RJ)
11:10 Jeddah (RJ)
11:25 Tunis, Casablanca (RJ)
12:15 Athens (RJ)
16:00 Jeddah (add)
20:10 Cairo (RJ)
20:15 Abu Dhabi, Dubai (RJ)
20:20 Athens (RJ)
20:35 Jeddah (RJ)
20:45 Damascus (RJ)
21:10 New Delhi (RJ)

MARKET PRICES

Upper/lower price in fils per kg.

Apple 700/500
Banana (Mukammal) 680
Banana (imported) 880/700
Cabbage 100/50
Carrot 250/150
Cauliflower 110/50
Cucumbers (large) 200/120
Cucumbers (small) 350/220
Eggplant 200/100
Garlic 750/500
Grape Fruit 220/150
Lemon 250/180
Marrow (large) 120/80
Marrow (small) 230/150
Onion (green) 220/150
Onion (dry) 230/150
Orange 260/180
Pepper (hot) 260/180
Pepper (sweet) 260/180
Radish 150/80

Fire-related accidents on the increase, says CDD official

By Rana Hussein
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — The Civil Defence Department (CDD) Saturday said the number of fire-related incidents has been on the increase in the past two months, resulting in 12 deaths and injury to 30 people.

"We have noticed an increase in the number of incidents related to heaters, especially portable and kerosene heaters, and in most cases children were the prime victims," Captain Farid Share', director of public relations at the CDD, said.

He said most of the cases reported since the beginning of this winter, and last year's 30 deaths and injury to 195 people "mainly involved children and foreign labourers."

"Children are prime targets in fires because it is usually children who cause fires and they are the first to get hurt," Capt. Share' told the Jordan Times.

Although the CDD official could not specify the number of children killed or injured in fire-related incidents in the past 18 months, he pointed out that children represent the high-

est numbers of victims in reported cases.

On Friday morning, a seven-year-old disabled child in Marka Shamaliya was killed and his three brothers were listed in fair condition when a lit kerosene heater set the furniture alight. The fire consequently engulfed their house. CDD reports identified the child as Ahmad Malek.

A similar incident also reported on Friday claimed the life of an 19-year-old woman in Mahata after a kerosene heater tipped over, setting the house alight. The woman, Halah Mohammad Hijazi died instantly, according to the reports.

"These are some examples of the many cases that we deal with, including suffocation incidents which contribute to deaths of foreign labourers," Capt. Share' pointed out, adding that foreign labourers represent the second highest numbers of victims in fire-related accidents.

He explained that most foreign workers come from countries where winters are not so harsh, and are therefore unaware of the potential dangers of kerosene heaters.

He referred to an incident which occurred two weeks ago in North Marka which claimed the lives of four foreign labourers who were killed inhaling carbon monoxide while sleeping in a small room with wood stove burning.

"These four labourers, for example, had spent less than 24 hours in the Kingdom and they went to sleep with wood burning in their room," he said.

Capt. Share' urged the public to be more careful and to follow safety procedures to prevent such incidents from happening.

Parents should keep their children away from stoves and monitor them at all times in the presence of heaters, Capt. Share' said.

He listed dangers such as cutting off air circulation by sleeping with a lit kerosene heater, heaters that are left unattended or within corridors or too close to flammable fabrics, including furniture.

"Despite our repeated warnings via television and other media about the dangers of gas and kerosene stoves we still see the same accidents on a daily basis. It seems that people are not responding to our calls," Capt. Share' said.

King to visit Israel next month

JERUSALEM (AFP) — His Majesty King Hussein is to visit Israel early next month to give an award to the negotiators of the peace accord signed between Israel and Jordan, officials said.

King Hussein is to bestow the award on the head of the Israeli negotiating team, Eliakim Rubinstein, and his Jordanian counterpart, Fayez Tarawneh, who is also Jordan's ambassador to the United States.

The ceremony is to take place at a conference centre on the Israeli shore of the Sea of Galilee, located in the northern part of the country.

The ceremony was to have been held in early November with the participation of Yitzhak Rabin, but was postponed after the Israeli prime minister was assassinated by a Jewish fanatic Nov. 4.

Jordan and Israel signed a peace accord on Oct. 28, last year.

Premier: Jordan Valley best suited for integrated development schemes

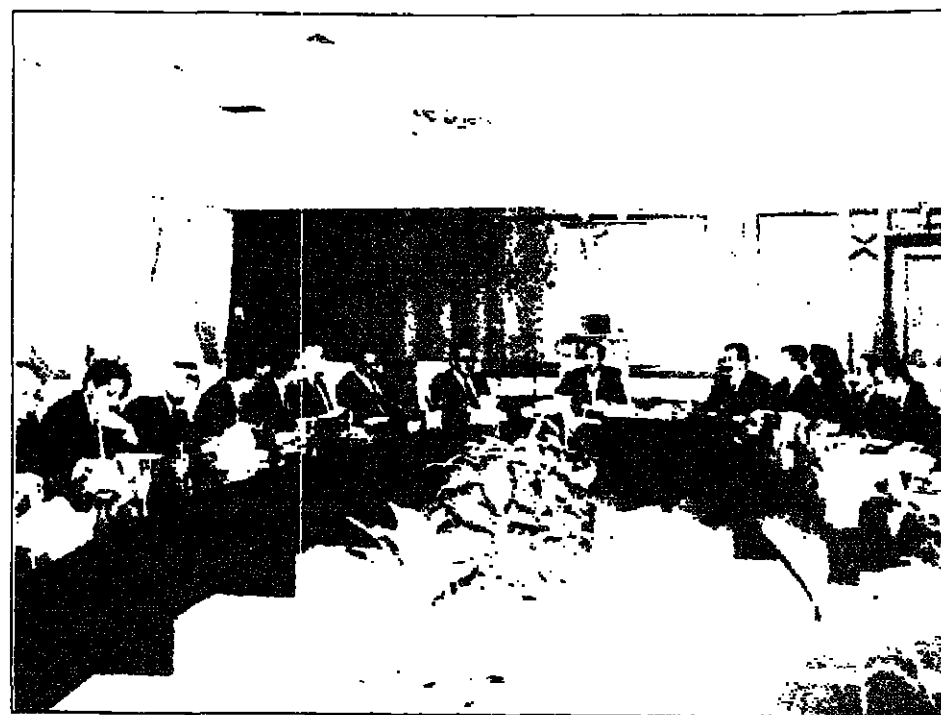
AMMAN (J.T.) — Prime Minister Sharif Zeid Ben Shaker Saturday said the Jordan Valley region is considered the largest and most suitable area for planned integrated development schemes which, if implemented, would raise the standard of people's lives in Jordan.

Chairing a meeting in his office for the Higher Ministerial Committee, responsible for international negotiations on the development of the Jordan Rift Valley, the prime minister said the implementation of projects in the valley would be in the interest of Jordan and the Jordanian people.

He warned, however, that special attention should be given, in the course of implementing these schemes, to ensure concrete benefits for all sectors in the valley.

At the meeting, which was attended by technicians involved in plans for the Jordan Valley projects, Minister of Water and Irrigation Saleh Irsheidat presented a report on integrated development in the valley, pointing to the stages that have been covered so far in the preparation of feasibility studies in cooperation with the World Bank.

Dr. Irsheidat also



Prime Minister Sharif Zeid Ben Shaker Saturday chairs a meeting for the Higher Ministerial Committee responsible for international negotiations on the development of the Jordan Rift Valley (Petra photo)

reviewed results of meetings by a special tripartite steering committee studying Jordan Valley plans. The committee consists of specialists from the United States, Jordan and Israel.

Dr. Irsheidat later told the Jordan News Agency, Petra, that projects in the valley will contribute to the

peace process, enhance stability in the region and bring about economic, social and environmental benefits to Jordan.

The minister said projects, such as the Dead Sea-Red Sea canal project, aims to produce electric energy, desalinating sea water and raising the level of Dead

Sea waters.

He said Jordan considers this project as the backbone for other projects in the valley. Assistant Secretary General of the JVA Zafer Alem told the Jordan Times last week that the plan for the development of the Jordan Rift Valley should be finalised in February 1997.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Jordanian gets into "Who's Who in the World"

AMMAN (J.T.) — Publishers of "Marquis Who's Who in America" have selected Hamzeh Mohammad Shaweesh from Jordan to be included in the forthcoming 13th edition of the book, "Marquis Who's Who in the World" in recognition of his outstanding achievements in the field of telecommunications. Mr. Shaweesh, who served as technical assistant to the Ministry of Post and Communication's secretary general will have his biography appearing in the forthcoming reference book. Mr. Shaweesh will be "recognised as a leader of contemporary society, one whose accomplishments are of worldwide reference interest," according to the publishers.

Ministry prepares training fund draft law

AMMAN (Petra) — The Ministry of Administrative Development has prepared a draft law for the creation of a special fund for financing the training of Jordanian personnel in administrative development affairs. The ministry said it will present the draft to a group of leading managers of private companies to sound out their remarks and comments to be incorporated in the draft law. The ministry also said the training of public administration employees in private and public sectors is bound to raise work efficiency.

Mayor meets with Kabardina Bulkaria minister

AMMAN (Petra) — Amman Mayor Mamdouh Abbadi conferred at his

office Saturday with the Minister of Information in the Kabardina Bulkaria Republic of the Russian Federation. They discussed the exchange of expertise in municipal services and in infrastructure projects. At the meeting which was attended by a delegation of the Circassian community in Jordan, Dr. Abbadi presented the visiting minister with a token gift.

Ministry publishes book on foreign policy

AMMAN (Petra) — The Ministry of Youth said Saturday it has published a book on Jordan's foreign policy. It said that the book is part of its ongoing programme to provide Jordanians with information on their country and to enlist their contribution to national development. According to the announcement the book covers Jordan's foreign policies since the establishment of the Emirate of Jordan under the leadership of the late King Abdullah in 1921.

Government official to negotiate oil supplies

AMMAN (Petra) — The secretary general of the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources, Ahmad Bashir, will travel to Baghdad Sunday at the head of a delegation to discuss arrangements for the continuation of oil supplies to Jordan for next year, with Iraqi officials. Mr. Bashir, who is to be accompanied to Baghdad by an official delegation grouping representatives of the Ministry of Finance and the Jordan Petroleum Refinery Company, will sign an agreement on these supplies. Ministry of Energy sources said Jordan is expected to need some 4.5 million tonnes of oil and oil products in 1996.

NRA, Malaysian company agree to oil, gas prospecting cooperation

AMMAN (J.T.) — The Natural Resources Authority (NRA) recently signed a memorandum of understanding with the Malaysian oil company, Petronas, on cooperation in the exchange of expertise and in the development of the oil industry in Jordan.

NRA Director General Fakhreddin Daghestani made the announcement Saturday following his return from a week-long visit to Malaysia where discussions between government officials and Petronas centred on means of cooperation in oil and natural gas industries.

Dr. Daghestani said that during the visit he was briefed by the Malaysian oil company on oil and gas exploration surveys conducted by them during a recent visit to the Kingdom. He said the results of the surveys were very encour-

aging. In light of the surveys, the Malaysian company will shortly sign a profit-sharing agreement with the NRA before starting oil prospecting operations in the Sarhan district in the north-eastern parts of the Kingdom, according to Dr. Daghestani.

The memorandum, which was signed during the visit to Malaysia, also provides for Petronas to give training to Jordanian NRA cadres, according to Dr. Daghestani. Mr. Daghestani and the director of the NRA's petroleum Department Director Khaled Shiyab, who accompanied him on the visit, toured Malaysia's oil and gas industrial installations.

According to Dr. Daghestani, Petronas will present its bid to prospect for oil and gas in Jordan to the

NRA next month.

Minister of Energy and Mineral Resources Samih Darwazah said earlier this week that Jordan expects to sign deals with U.S. firms early next year on oil and gas concessions and joint prospecting ventures.

Meanwhile, the local Arabic daily Al-Dustour Saturday quoted the board chairman of the National Oil Company, Rajab Sa'ad, as saying that Jordan has discovered huge gas deposits at Rishah near the Iraqi border, estimated to produce 10 million cubic feet of gas on a daily basis.

Mr. Sa'ad said additional finds will boost gas-generated electrical supplies, which currently generates 12 per cent of the Kingdom's electricity needs.

Debate fails to define relationship between government, press

(Continued from page 1)
that does not follow a failed example as happened in Egypt for instance.

If we establish a council for the press, then we should have "a council that preserves the profession and safeguards it as is the case in Britain," he said.

Another argument forwarded by Mr. Izzedine in favour of more freedoms and lesser restrictions on the press was the constitution itself and the international treaties and conventions that Jordan ratified. Citing the constitution's articles that state that freedom of expression and the press are guaranteed within the limits of the law and pointing to the universal

declaration of human rights that Jordan endorsed, Mr. Izzedine said that Jordan would lose credibility not only on the national level but the international level as well if more constraints were imposed on the press.

"We will be subjected to serious international criticisms that the country can make without," he said.

"How can we isolate ourselves at a time when e-mail and the information superhighway are available to everyone?" he added. "Have we really thought about preparing ourselves for the future to be ready to accept this flow of information and how can we use it and who will be responsible for this system?"

Mr. Tal said that the only means available to opponents to amending the law is the Parliament.

"If we believe in democracy then the Parliament is the party to seek since it is the one which monitors the performance of the government," he said.

The participating journalists and writers who attended the meeting generally voiced disagreement with Mr. Tal's contentions over the role of the press and the need to impose more restrictions on it.

Leading columnist and writer Fahed Faneek said that the King had agreed in a meeting with journalists last Thursday that the jour-

nalists themselves find the means for "rectifying the situation" through the adoption of a code of honour.

"The proposed amendments are instilling terror in the journalism milieu," Mr. Faneek said. "If such amendments were introduced then we should be better off not writing at all."

Mr. Tal replied: "If the meeting with the King solved the issue, then we don't have any problem at hand. If (we are) giving our judges the right to take precautionary measures, does this mean (we are) backward?"

"In countries all over the world, the judge has the right to confiscate (any

publication) if it infringed upon the social cohesion or on people's dignity."

Mr. Izzedine replied: "Perhaps they have the right, but we have not heard for once that the New York Times was closed down nor the Daily Mail. There are cases filed. And this is what is required."

"The press has the role of revealing information to the public. Why do I constantly attack the press without having any conviction in its mission and message?"

The participants and speakers called for a national dialogue on the role of the press and the proposed amendments.

Assad urges full speed

(Continued from page 1)
ple's commitment to their rights.

"If peace is to have any basis, that basis is land and whoever says he doesn't want to give land automatically means that he does not want peace," he added.

Syria maintains that full Israeli withdrawal from the Golan is written into U.N. Security Council resolutions and into the terms of the Middle East peace conference held in 1991.

Israeli leaders have been coming round to the idea of a full withdrawal from the Golan Heights but they re-

fuse to say exactly how far they will go until Syria tells them exactly what kind of peace agreement it envisages.

Israel's chief peace negotiator Uri Savir has also indicated that Israel is flexible about its demand for the early warning stations on the Golan Heights.

"The (Israeli) army will determine the necessary conditions regarding the security arrangements ... the army has to know: security arrangements under what peace framework? What is the peace framework? What is the territorial framework?" he said.

Once that framework was known, the army would set Israel's security demands and peace negotiators would try to achieve them in talks with Syria, Mr. Savir added.

Mr. Mubarak, for his part, said there was "currently flexibility in the horizons of peace and President Assad knows this. The speed of the process depends on the extent of flexibility Israel shows."

Israeli Foreign Minister Ehud Barak was expected in Egypt late Saturday for a two-day working visit.

Assad also underlined the ties between the Syrian and

Lebanese peace tracks with Israel.

"Syria and Lebanon have an understanding. Everyone dealing with us knows that there are links between the tracks and the two countries," he said.

The news conference followed tripartite talks between Mr. Assad, Mr. Mubarak and Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Saud Al Faisal, who had separate talks with Mr. Mubarak earlier.

Mr. Mubarak and Prince Saud discussed the dispute between Yemen and Eritrea over two Red Sea islands but Mr. Mubarak told the news conference there was no joint Saudi-Egyptian initiative to mediate in the dispute.

Egypt, which favours a ceasefire and a negotiated settlement, sent envoys to both Yemen and Eritrea on Saturday, Mubarak said. He did not name them.

"We believe that the parties should sit together and agree on a solution to this problem because they are two friendly countries. They should solve the problem according to charters and laws," he added.

Prince Saud Al Faisal held talks earlier with his Syrian and Egyptian counterparts, Farouq Al Sharaa and Amr Musa, on "the situation in the Arab World, Arab reconciliation and the peace process," Mr. Musa told journalists.

WHAT'S GOING ON

EXHIBITIONS

* Photography exhibition, Kingdom Of Peace, by Zohrab Markarian at The National Gallery, Jabal Weibdeh. (Until Dec. 26th).

* Works by artist Hind Nasser at Darat Al Funun (until Jan. 6).

* Photography by poet Ibrahim Nassrallah entitled "The Autobiography of an Eye" at Darat Al Funun, Jabal

Weibdeh. (Until Jan. 4).

* Photography exhibition "Biblical Itineraries" at the French Cultural Centre. (Until Dec. 30).

CHRISTMAS SALE

* Gifts and crafts by Suha Lallas Kassisieh (includes Christmas items, table mats, baskets, wall-hangings, candle-holders and side-lamps) at the Jordan Design and Trade Centre off the Noor Al Hussein Foundation, off Wadi Saqra Street (until Dec. 31).

Sri Lankan rebels wipe out army patrol; toll hits 80

COLOMBO (Agencies) — Tamil Tiger guerrillas ambushed an army patrol in eastern Sri Lanka Saturday, losing an estimated 50 cadres of their own and killing at least 30 soldiers, the military said.

Gunmen of the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) attacked the soldiers at Shanthiveli in the Batticaloa district while they were on a routine patrol guarding the main highway, a military spokesman said.

The attack was the worst against the army in eastern Sri Lanka since an identical ambush that left 38 soldiers dead in the same area a month ago while soldiers were guarding a nearby railway line.

The military spokesman said soldiers were guarding the land supply route to Batticaloa district when they were overwhelmed by a mass of Tiger cadres.

"There had been a very intense fire fight and a large number of Tigers killed. We have lost at least 30 soldiers killed and about another 30 wounded. We have confirmation of 50 LTTE deaths," the spokesman said.

Defence officials said the LTTE had taken over vast areas of the island's east after

the fall of their former citadel of Jaffna in the north of the country to security forces earlier this month.

As Jaffna fell on Dec. 2, the LTTE launched a kamikaze-style attack on police commandos in the east, killing at least 23 security personnel and six civilians. The army claimed killing an equal number of Tigers.

The LTTE is leading a protracted campaign for an independent homeland in the island's northern and eastern regions where the two million Tamil minority is concentrated. More than 50,000 people have died over the past 23 years.

Security forces shot dead at least one Tamil Tiger guerrilla and discovered an abandoned rebel munitions factory in northern Sri Lanka during a clearing operation, the military said Saturday.

A small group of rebels were located at Suthumalai in the Jaffna peninsula, triggering a fire fight Friday, the military said in a statement. It said there were no casualties among government troops but that further clearing operations were continuing while the army discovered an abandoned bomb manufacturing facility in the

same area.

Security forces captured Jaffna from the LTTE earlier this month after nearly 50 days of fighting, but defence officials said there were still remnants of rebel pockets there.

The town of Jaffna was the capital of a de facto separate state the LTTE had run from 1990 till earlier this month when all their administrative structures were dismantled following a major military onslaught.

Meanwhile, the LTTE, in a statement from its London office, said Hindu priests were planning a massive prayer campaign Sunday in a bid to end the suffering of Tamils displaced by the fighting in the island's north.

A three-hour special religious ceremony will be held across Hindu temples in areas under their control, the LTTE said in a statement sent here from its London office.

"This is to get the blessings of gods to alleviate the untold miseries of the refugees and for a harmonious life for the people," the LTTE said. Most of Sri Lanka's minority Tamils are Hindus while the main religion of the majority Sinhalese community is Buddhism.

The LTTE statement came as the government told Tamil legislators that some 3,000 Tamil civilians who moved into refugee camps in Jaffna amid the army operation from Oct. 17 to Dec. 2 could return home shortly.

But the Tigers have prevented tens of thousands of Tamil civilians who sought shelter in areas under their control from moving back to their homes in and around Jaffna town.

The Tigers had earlier said that refugees in areas under their control were leading "normal, comfortable and profitable lives," cultivating land given them by the guerrillas who still control vast areas of the island's north.

Hundreds of thousands of Christians and Hindus on the run from fighting in north will spend Christmas praying for relief from their suffering, Tamil rebels and leaders said Saturday.

The refugees are holed up in camps, mud huts, deserted shops, under the cover of verandas or palm leaf roofs or any other shelter to be found north and south of the Jaffna lagoon, the strip of water dividing the rebel-held northern peninsula from the mainland, relief workers say.

Charred bodies of 14 cult members found in France

SAINT-PIERRE-DE-CHERENNES, France (R) — The charred bodies of 14 missing members of the Order of the Solar Temple cult, one of them an infant, were found Saturday in a forest clearing in rugged French Alpine terrain, police said.

The dead were found laid out in a star shape in the clearing, feet at the centre, in the carefully-planned ritual, death, an apparent repeat of the cult's mysterious 1994 mass immolation in which 53 died, a police spokesman said.

The heavily-wooded area on the Vercors Plateau near Grenoble in eastern France had been cleared and cut down branches were used to feed the fire which burned the bodies, said Andre Romy, mayor of the tiny nearby village of Saint-Pierre-De-Cherennes.

A total of 16 cult members, including three children aged two, four and six, were reported missing, raising the question of the whereabouts of the other two infants.

It was unclear whether the bodies were arranged in the star shape after their deaths by surviving cult members, or by the cult members themselves before their deaths. The bodies were found Saturday morning in a police search of the rugged Alpine

terrain after four cars belonging to the missing cult members were found in the area, abandoned.

Police cordoned off the cars in case they were booby-trapped.

Swiss police investigating the disappearance had found a note saying their death was a "pure illusion," raising fears of a repeat of last year's collective suicide-cum-murder in Switzerland and Canada.

The bodies were initially spotted from a helicopter at about 9 a.m. (0800 GMT). Hundreds of police were sent to find them after their cars were found abandoned Friday night.

The clearing was two kilometres from where the cars were discovered and about 60 kilometres southwest of Grenoble.

The cars were spotted last Sunday by hunters who only reported their find after the cult members, eight French and eight Swiss nationals, were reported missing this week. There were children's seats strapped into the abandoned cars.

Another car, belonging to the wife of French 1960 Olympic downhill ski champion Jean Vuarnet, was abandoned outside a nightclub in the town of Saint-Julien-En-Genevois near the Swiss border. Edith Vuarnet, her son Patrick and his Swiss girl-

friend and her six-year-old daughter were among the missing.

Also missing were two French police officers with their service pistols and ammunition, two architects, a nurse and a homeopath from the Swiss Vaud Canton.

The 1,000-metre (3,300 ft) Vercors Plateau, used as a hideout by French resistance fighters in World War II, has steep access routes and is dotted with remote farmhouses where cult members could have met without drawing attention.

Cult members used to gather around the Dec. 21 winter solstice, apparently a symbolic date for the bizarre cult, according to French media reports.

The order borrows freely from Roman Catholic religion, Freemasonry and medieval rites of the Knights Templars.

It was believed to have disbanded after its leaders Jo Di Mambro and Luc Joutet were found among members who died at the Swiss villages of Salvan and Cheiry in October 1994. Other members of the cult died in Canada.

The handwritten note, found during police searches of homes and a Geneva meeting place of the cult, proclaimed: "Death does not exist, it is pure illusion. May we, by our inner life, find each other forever."

Senate to challenge Clinton in court over Whitewater

WASHINGTON (AP) — After a debate over the integrity of the White House, a divided U.S. Senate voted to take President Bill Clinton to court for refusing to turn over disputed Whitewater notes.

The 51-45 vote, along partisan lines, marks the first time since Watergate that Congress has approved a court challenge of a president in a dispute over documents.

A court battle could be blocked off as the White House moved closer to eliminating the final roadblock to releasing the notes on its own — reaching a separate agreement with House Republicans. Both sides sounded optimistic.

With such an agreement near, Democrats said the Senate Republicans' court challenge was unnecessary. The vote is "an unnecessary, headline-seeking ploy designed for one purpose and one purpose only: to damage the president," Senate minority leader Tom Daschle complained.

But Republicans, drawing allusions to the President Nixon's Watergate scandal two decades ago, said Wednesday they could wait no longer to get the documents. Before the final vote, they turned away a Democratic proposal to give the White House more time on a vote of 51-45.

Malawi's Banda acquitted of conspiracy to murder

BLANTYRE, Malawi (R) — Malawi's High Court Saturday acquitted former President Kamuzu Banda, two close associates and three policemen of conspiracy in the 1983 murder of four opposition politicians.

"We came up with a unanimous verdict of not guilty of all charges," said the foreman of the seven-member jury in a short statement after deliberating for 90 minutes.

Prosecutor Kamudoni Nyasulu said he would appeal against the acquittal of Mr. Banda, who ruled Malawi for three decades until being ousted in the country's first multi-party elections last year, his former top aide John Tembo, official hostess Cecilia Kadzandira and three senior policemen.

"We have 30 days to appeal. Obviously we will appeal. I was expecting this from yesterday. The judge was part of the defence. He was not being impartial," Mr. Nyasulu told reporters.

The government had originally planned two trials, one for murder, the other for conspiracy. The state dropped the murder charges.

Mr. Banda, Ms. Kadzandira, Mr. Tembo and the police officers were charged with the 1983 murders of three cabinet ministers and a member of parliament. All six had pleaded not guilty.

They were charged after a commission of inquiry determined that the police killed

the four politicians on government orders, contradicting reports they had died in a road accident.

Mr. Banda, who is in his mid-90's, did not appear in court in person because of frail health.

The former president's British lawyer Clive Stanbrook said Mr. Nyasulu had no basis for an appeal.

"The judge concentrated on the evidence and the defence concentrated on the evidence. I do not think there is any basis for an appeal. No doubt, when he (Nyasulu) sits down to reflect on it, he will see there was no case," Mr. Stanbrook said.

More than 1,000 Banda supporters thronged the court, erupting into cheering and singing soon after the jury announced the "not guilty" verdict. Security was tight but police did not act.

Mr. Tembo immediately addressed his supporters, saying he and all the defendants were happy that the government's legislative arms, has shown its independence.

"Now we are all free to go and see the Ngwazi (the hero Banda)," he said.

On Friday the High Court judge hearing the case, Mackson Mkandawire, said in his view there was no evidence showing that Mr. Banda had ordered the killing of the four politicians.

N. Korea appeals to its army to be on red alert

SEOUL (AFP) — North Korea has warned its armed forces to be on a state of "red alert" against possible provocations by the South Korean and U.S. troops, the North's mouthpiece, Korea Central News Agency (KCNA) said Saturday.

The KCNA dispatch, monitored in Seoul and in Tokyo, quoted Vice-Marshal Jo Myong-Rok, director of the Korean People's Army Political Department, "appealing to officers and men... to be on red alert with a high degree of revolutionary vigilance."

"The present situation... puts the officers and men of our people's army and our people to be on maximum alert," it said, adding that if "the enemy dare unleash a new war in this land" North Koreans would fight to the finish.

Belligerent rhetoric has been high on both sides of the demilitarised zone (DMZ) dividing the two Koreas in the

past month, with the South's President Kim Young-Sam also warning of possible military provocations from the North.

Mr. Kim's government has said it is monitoring the North's military movements near the DMZ, though most military experts here discount them as any more than winter training manoeuvres.

Pyongyang in the past week has lashed out at an exercise slated for January in the sea off the Korean peninsula by the U.S. aircraft carrier Enterprise.

A Japanese news network said Saturday recent redeployments by North Korea's armed forces are aimed at curbing possible social unrest as the Stalinist state faces severe food shortages.

Quoting U.S. Defence Department sources, Japan Broadcasting Corp. (NHK) said, the movements were believed to be an attempt to tighten up security.

Rwanda lashes out at Ghali's remarks

UNITED NATIONS (R) — Rwanda criticised U.N. Secretary-General Boutros Ghali for warning that the central African nation could descend into genocide again if the refugee crisis were not solved.

"His statement has the impact of destroying the climate of confidence that the new government of Rwanda has been working so hard — against all odds — to develop in a ravaged country," said Rwanda's U.N. mission Friday.

Dr. Ghali Tuesday told a press conference that two million refugees in Zaire and Tanzania feared returning home.

"Everybody is afraid that a new genocide may happen, this time not by the Hutu against the Tutsi but by the Tutsi against the Hutu," he said.

The secretary-general had been asked about the U.N. troops, which Rwanda wants out of the country in three months, in the increasingly troubled relationship between the Tutsi-dominated Kigali government and the United Nations.

Most of the refugees are Hutus who fled Rwanda after minority Tutsis took over the government more than a year ago. Hutu troops and militiamen last year killed up to a million Tutsis and Hutu moderates.

Rwanda, in its three-page statement, said Dr. Ghali's comments could be interpreted as a lack of support for the Kigali government.

"The new government of Rwanda has demonstrated to the world that it has not established a state policy of revenge," it said. "The present government's policies will never allow another genocide."

U.N. officials did not react to the statement but Dr.

Ghali earlier Friday said he was "extremely concerned by increasing violence in neighbouring Burundi, a country with the same ethnic mix as Rwanda."

"Members of the humanitarian community... have become targets of this unrest," he said, calling on all parties to "honour the neutrality of humanitarian organisations and not to impede the provision of assistance to innocent victims."

Both Rwanda and Burundi have Hutu majorities and Tutsi minorities and both their armies are mostly Tutsis. The Burundi Hutu-led government is under increasing pressure from the army, blamed for much of the violence.

Dr. Ghali also named a retired Canadian diplomat, Marc Faguy, as his new representative for Burundi to replace Ahmedou Ould Abdallah of Mauritania, who finished a two-year assignment there in October.

Mr. Faguy, a former official in the Canadian Agency for International Development, had held ambassadorial or other senior posts in Ghana, Togo, Benin, Liberia, Cameroon, Chad and the Central African Republic.

Meanwhile, the attacks against foreign aid agencies in Burundi has forced them to consider pulling out as thousands of Rwandan refugees press to go home.

Burundian Prime Minister Antoine Nduwayo Friday lamented a grenade attack that wounded a U.N. logistics officer in the town of Ngozi Thursday night.

He also offered condolences to the families of more than 30 people killed by gunmen in Mukike Commune near Bujumbura Thursday and of the assassinated governor of Ngozi town.

U.N. condemns Nigeria, Cuba and Burma on human rights

UNITED NATIONS (AFP) — The U.N. General Assembly, acting on the last day of its session Friday, added Nigeria to its list of countries such as Iraq, Cuba and Burma which are condemned every year for their human rights abuses.

Nigeria was condemned by a vote of 101-to-14, with 47 abstentions, over the strong objections of its ambassador, Ibrahim Gambari, who assailed the move as interference in Nigeria's sovereignty.

"The principle sponsors of this resolution have not only launched a campaign of disinformation, but have demonstrated unusual arrogance of power in seeking to prescribe who governs Nigeria, when and how," Mr. Gambari told the Assembly.

The text was a cushioned version of the strong action sought by the United States following the execution of nine activists, including the author Ken Saro-Wiwa last month. Washington took strong unilateral action, and is still considering an oil embargo.

"We consider it very important that the United Nations has in fact condemned Nigeria's behaviour," U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Madeleine Albright said. "We think it is an important signal that the inter-

national community cannot condone these kinds of murders."

Cuba was condemned by a vote of 66-to-22 with 78 abstentions; Iraq was condemned 111-to-3 with 53 abstentions; Burma was condemned without a vote following a consensus in the drafting committee.

The votes were consistent with the support level received when the resolutions were passed last week by the Third Committee, which forwards action to the General Assembly.

The Cuban representative expressed concern "about continuing serious violations of human rights in Cuba, of which the majority are violations of civil and political rights."

The Cuban representative called it "a further stage in an exercise which has been one of worst injustices in the recent history of this organisation, thought up by and imposed by the superpower that doesn't conceal its efforts to crush the ideals of freedom and social justice which have inspired our country."

"The government of the United States is utterly lacking in the political and moral authority needed to pronounce itself arbiter of human rights in Cuba," he said. The Burma resolution was not debated, but its language

deplored the human rights situation there. When it was adopted in committee 10 days ago, Mrs. Albright had said Burma's State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) was operating outside of the law and internationally recognised standards of human rights.

She warned that "the SLORC should have no doubt that it will be held responsible for any actions that result in physical harm or unjust punishment against those who have simply engaged in the peaceful exercise of internationally recognised rights."

The vote on Iraq condemned the "massive and extremely grave violations of human rights... resulting in an all-pervasive order of repression and oppression which is sustained by broad-based discrimination and widespread terror."

Before it was passed, a representative from Iraq said the resolution was of a "political nature," and accused the 111 countries voting for it of using human rights "as a cover for illegitimate political means."

The General Assembly also took action to varying degrees against human rights abuses in Haiti, Iran, member countries of the former Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, Sudan, Serbia and Rwanda.

New Polish president sworn in

WARSAW (AFP) — Former Communist Aleksandr Kwasniewski was sworn in Saturday as Poland's new president, succeeding Lech Walesa as the leader of the East European country.

Mr. Kwasniewski, who narrowly defeated the erstwhile trade union leader after a bitter battle for the presidency in elections on Nov. 19, took an oath of loyalty to

the Polish Constitution in front of the Polish parliament as he officially took up the reins of power.

Mr. Walesa and several opposition deputies chose to boycott the swearing-in ceremony, as did Poland's prime minister Cardinal Jozef Glemp and other Catholic dignitaries.

Meanwhile, outside the

parliament building around 1,500 anti-Communist demonstrators gathered to protest against the investiture, shouting slogans and throwing firecrackers.

Supporters of the reformed Communist, whose Democratic Left Alliance (SLD) now holds a monopoly on power, also rallied outside the building.

Charles 'has no intention to remarry'

LONDON (AP) — Prince Charles, urged to divorce by his mother, has no intention of remarrying, officials said, apparently seeking to rule out a controversial second marriage to his long-time love, Camilla Parker Bowles.

The news came after Queen Elizabeth II, sick of public bickering between Prince Charles and Princess Diana and fearing its effect on the monarchy, urged — some reports said ordered — the couple to divorce soon.

Princess Diana, according to the Daily Mail, was furious at the leak of the news of the queen's letters, delivered to her at Kensington Palace and Prince Charles at St. James's Palace earlier this week.

Around midday, she drove out of Kensington Palace in a car with darkened windows. Some reports said her sons, Prince William, 13, and Prince Harry, 11, were with her.

"The Prince of Wales has no intention of remarrying," his press secretary Allan Percival said. "This has been the subject of great speculation and we are now making clear the prince's position."

Christmas at the queen's Sandringham Estate, Princess Diana has refused to go.

The queen, whose patience apparently snapped after Princess Diana, in a BBC television interview last month, questioned Prince Charles' suitability to be king. She also acknowledged an extramarital affair, said she did not want a divorce and would not "go quietly."

The Daily Mail said Princess Diana was in no hurry to answer the queen, and she would do nothing anyway for the next two weeks because her lawyers were on vacation.

Princess Diana blames 48-year-old Mrs. Parker Bowles, who Prince Charles has known and, some say, loved for 25 years, largely for the break-up of the marriage.

Mrs. Parker Bowles divorced recently and now lives in a new home near Prince Charles' country estate in Gloucestershire.

Singapore not really a boring place — survey

SINGAPORE (R) — Does Clean, orderly Singapore deserve a reputation as "boring"? No, according to a newspaper survey of 519 Singaporeans and permanent residents published Saturday. The survey said local life has apparently perked up since 1987, when a study by the London-based Economist Intelligence Unit ranked Singapore the most boring place to live in 48 countries which were surveyed. Critics of Singapore often cite tight media controls and a general absence of risqué nightlife to support their notion that the city state of three million is a yawn.

The survey found 75 per cent disagreed Singapore is a boring place, the Straits Times reported. Only 28 per cent agreed. Respondents said Singapore had enough facilities to cater to interests from shopping to sports — and there is enough free time to enjoy them. They also applauded recent stagings of big-scale musicals such as Phantom Of The Opera and Les Miserables. However, some 50 per cent said they were less than satisfied with the standard of nightlife. The country has a sufficient number of pubs, lounges and discos but they are too similar to each other and overpriced, the survey found.

Cult members used to gather around the Dec. 21 winter solstice, apparently a symbolic date for the bizarre cult, according to French media reports.

The order borrows freely from Roman Catholic religion, Freemasonry and medieval rites of the Knights Templars. It was believed to have disbanded after its leaders Jo Di Mambro and Luc Joutet were found among members who died at the Swiss villages of Salvan and Cheiry in October 1994. Other members of the cult died in Canada.

The handwritten note, found during police searches of homes and a Geneva meeting place of the cult, proclaimed: "Death does not exist, it is pure illusion. May we, by our inner life, find each other forever."

8 China high school students attempt suicide

BEIJING (R) — A group of eight high school students attempted suicide in northeast China this month because of pressure at school, the Workers' Daily said Saturday. Teachers at the Shenyang Number Eight High School in Liaoning province found the sophomores, aged between 14 and 16, either unconscious or vomiting Tuesday after an overdose of sedatives, the newspaper said. The students, six girls and two boys, were rushed to hospital, where seven were still recuperating, it said. When asked why they attempted suicide, some cited pressure at school while others said they were bored of school or acted on impulse. In China, admission to university is highly competitive.

Patient with baboon bone marrow feels discomfort

SAN FRANCISCO (R) — AIDS patient Jeff Getty, injected with baboon bone marrow just over a week ago in a historic transplant, was feeling some discomfort attributed to radiation, doctors said. Mr. Getty, 38, has been experiencing some nausea and a stomach discomfort, but the main doctor caring for Mr. Getty said the discomfort was anticipated. "This is all expected," said Steven Deeks, assistant professor at the University of California at San Francisco. He added the discomfort should end soon. Mr. Getty underwent chemotherapy and radiation in preparation for the baboon bone marrow infusion. The radiation was designed to make "space" in his bone marrow for baboon cells. "Part of that radiation hit the lining of his stomach and caused some inflammation of that lining," Dr. Deeks said. "His condition is good. But it's still day-to-day. The chemotherapy and radiation were also expected to reduce Mr. Getty's white blood cell count, thereby weakening his defences against infection over the next few weeks before it strengthens."

U.S. couple first to adopt Vietnamese triplets

BANGKOK (AP) — Eileen Degroff travelled 13,000 miles to become a mother. When she flies home to Syracuse, N.Y., for Christmas, she and her husband Frank will celebrate three times over — with their adopted Vietnamese triplets, Christina, Elizabeth and Julia, aged six months, will make this an exceptional yule for the Degroffs. After trying for more than five years to adopt children, they have become the first foreigners to adopt triplets in Vietnam, Eileen said Thursday. It wasn't a snap decision. "We thought about how much it was going to cost to raise three kids and whether we could even afford it," Eileen told the Associated Press. "When one of us had doubts, the other felt confident, so we balanced each other nicely."

Russian troops break through to Gudermes railway station

MOSCOW (Agencies) —

Russian troops Saturday broke through to the railway station in Gudermes where Chechen separatists had kept about 70 Russian troops pinned down, ITAR-TASS news agency reported, citing Interior Ministry command officials.

The Russian troops were continuing their offensive aimed at driving Chechen separatists out of the town, ITAR-TASS reported.

Earlier the news agency said Russian troops had suspended their offensive against Chechen separatists in the town, 30 kilometres east of the Chechen capital Grozny, for fear of inflicting further civilian casualties.

Chechen separatists loyal to independence leader Dzhokhar Dudayev launched a surprise attack on Russian troops in Gudermes, Chechnya's second town, 10 days ago to coincide with Russian-organised Chechen leadership elections in the

Caucasus republic.

Witnesses from the town have reported scores of civilians killed and injured since Russian troops began bombarding the Chechen rebels.

On Friday, the separatists repulsed a Russian assault on the Gudermes Railway Station. Russian troops were reported to have battled heavily to capture the station, before being ordered to withdraw under fire.

Military authorities were quoted by ITAR-TASS Saturday as saying that a corridor had been left open for refugees, but that many civilians remained, complicating military assaults.

However, civilian witnesses and journalists said Russian forces encircling the town have already used Grad multiple rockets, heavy artillery and helicopters to blast the rebels into submission, causing widespread destruction.

The mayor of Gudermes

told AFP in an interview this week that Russian helicopter gunships had been used to open fire on refugee columns and that there were bodies lying in the streets of the town.

Refugees spoke of at least 100 civilian dead, including people who were dying of wounds because there is virtually no heat, sanitation or medical help in the town.

On Friday, the Russian Interior Ministry in Moscow said the fighting in Gudermes had left 36 Russian soldiers dead, 141 wounded and 37 missing after one week, ITAR-TASS news agency reported.

Two soldiers were killed and four wounded in Chechnya overnight, Russian military officials said, without giving details.

Chechen separatist military Commander Aslan Maskhadov said that hundreds of Russian soldiers have died in Gudermes. There is no estimate of how many Chechen

fighters have been killed. In Washington, the United States has renewed its calls for an end to fighting in Chechnya, saying the Russian military operation in the region has been a big mistake.

State Department spokesman Nicholas Burns, commenting on reports of intensified fighting in the Chechen town of Gudermes, said Friday that the U.S. position on Chechnya was no secret.

"The operation in Chechnya has been a grave, grave mistake, and too many people have died," Mr. Burns told reporters at a weekly briefing.

"We call upon both the Russian government and the Chechen forces to stop the fighting," he said.

"It's a great tragedy, one year after the initial fighting began, that Chechnya's second-largest city would be devastated by the fighting," Mr. Burns said.



Russian soldiers load a gun during shelling of positions held by Chechen separatist fighters in Gudermes, Chechnya's second biggest town east of Grozny (AFP photo)

Indian school fire kills over 300

NEW DELHI (AFP) — More than 300 people, many of them children, were killed Saturday when a fire raged through a banquet hall in northern India where a school was holding an annual function, officials said.

Hundreds of others were injured in the blaze apparently sparked by an electrical short-circuit in the town of Dabwali, some 280 kilometres (175 miles) north-west of here, an Indian minister said.

Selja Kumari, a deputy minister in Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao's cabinet who represents the area in parliament, said more than 300 people had been killed and the toll was likely to rise.

"It is a massive tragedy," she said, shortly before leaving for Dabwali, a town of about 400,000 in the state of Haryana. She quoted some Dabwali residents as saying that hundreds of people had been injured and hospitalised.

Local officials and domestic news agencies said the fire

broke out around 2:00 p.m. (0830 GMT) at the Rajiv Marriage Palace where hundreds of children of the local DAV school and their parents had gathered for an annual function.

The Press Trust of India (PTI) said a cloth tent over the walled, open air structure caught fire and collapsed on the crowd, trapping thousands of guests and triggering a panic.

It said many of the victims died in a stampede for the single small entrance.

"I was told that the whole place went up in flames within minutes," Ms. Kumari said. "Nobody knows exactly what happened. Everyone ran in panic. The toll is likely to be higher."

Srikant Walgade, the additional deputy commissioner for Haryana's Sirsa district where Dabwali is located, said by telephone that at least 2,000 boys and girls of the school and their parents were attending the get-together.

Mr. Walgade said "between 200 and 400" people

were believed to have died in the blaze, which razed the banquet hall. "It was a major fire," he said. "There are many, many casualties."

Local officials used Dabwali's few ambulances and private vehicles to rush the victims to hospitals in the town and elsewhere in Haryana and the adjoining state of Punjab.

Some 100 victims with up to 60 per cent burns, some in agony, were admitted to the government hospital at Sirsa, 60 kilometres from Dabwali.

A senior local government official and a top police officer were among the seriously injured.

Minister Kumari said the fire was probably caused by a short-circuit.

"But some people are saying a gas cylinder kept there for making tea exploded suddenly," she said. "But it seems (to me) it was a short-circuit that destroyed the place."

The Haryana state government ordered an investigation into the tragedy.

India links Hong Kong air charter to arms drop

BOMBAY (R) — A senior Indian official said Saturday that the crew of a private charter plane detained by authorities helped the mysterious air drop of an arms consignment in eastern India earlier this week.

Indian authorities have launched a manhunt for a New Zealander they believed fled the aircraft after the Indian Air Force (IAF) forced it to land at Bombay Friday.

The United News of India quoted Manish Gupta, the most senior home (interior) official in the state of West Bengal, as saying home (interior) official in the state of West Bengal, as saying the interrogation of crew members revealed that the air drop in three villages of Purulia district was deliberate.

The air drop took place in darkness in the early hours of Sunday but was reported by local witnesses.

Police are questioning the six crewmen aboard the AN-26 aircraft, which was forced down by two IAF warplanes after Indian authorities suspected it had dropped three crates of weapons such as AK-47 assault rifles and ammunition.

A seventh man, listed in the passenger manifest as Kim Davy, is missing, authorities at airports all over India have been alerted to stop him leaving the country.

Police officials in Bombay said they believed Davy, who reportedly runs the Hong Kong-based charter service, may have left the aircraft when it stopped at other Indian airports before landing in Bombay early Friday morning.

"But we have launched a search for Davy," said a senior intelligence official who declined to be identified.

Immigration and customs staff at Indian airports have been supplied with Davy's photograph, he said. Davy's driving licence was reportedly found aboard the aircraft.

The crew, five Latvians and a Briton identified as Peter Bleach, are being interrogated by a team of police and intelligence officials.

"The circumstances appear to be loaded against them," said a senior police official. "Their stories are inconsistent."

He said Bleach had told the interrogators the crew were on a joyride. He quoted Mr. Bleach as claiming that the crew were celebrating Christmas.

The aircraft was on its way from the southeastern port of Madras, bound for Karachi, when the Bombay air traffic controller asked it to land, officials said.

The 25-tonne cargo hold of the aircraft was empty.

Bombay Police Chief Ramdeo Tyagi said the Latvian members of its crew had spent the last two months in Karachi before flying out of the Pakistani port city Monday.

It stopped at Varanasi and Calcutta before flying on to Phuket in Thailand, Col. Tyagi said. On its way back to Karachi after a three-day stay, the aircraft stopped at Madras Thursday to refuel, he added.

Italy's Dini confirms he will resign

ROME (R) — Italian Prime Minister Lamberto Dini, saying his technocrat government had completed its limited agenda, said Saturday he would offer his resignation as expected by the end of next week.

"The government has practically completed its programme," Mr. Dini said at an end-of-year news conference in Rome at which he painted an upbeat picture of the Italian economy and his government's achievements.

Parliament passed the country's 1996 budget Friday night, after months of uncertainty that forced the former central banker to resort to several confidence votes to ram the legislation through.

"Therefore I will offer my resignation to the head of state before the end of the year as agreed," said Mr. Dini, who has been in office since former Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi's government collapsed last December.

Mr. Dini's resignation will open the way to a showdown in parliament between the country's left and right groups to decide on the immediate political future just as Italy takes on the sixth-month European Union presidency.

"The decisions about the future will be taken by the political forces. They will decide," said the former central banker, assuring European partners that carrying out the EU presidency was the immediate priority.

He did not exclude the possibility that he might be in power in January although he said he was not campaigning.

"I am satisfied and gratified by what I have achieved. I am not plotting, not holding meetings or making plans. I am waiting for the politicians to have their say," said Mr. Dini.

He said there were two

main options ahead: "Either a broadly-backed government to carry out reforms or a stopgap one to lead the country to an early general election."

Only President Oscar Luigi Scalfaro has the authority to appoint or dismiss a government.

The centre-left, which backs Mr. Dini in parliament, also favours keeping him in office until after the EU presidency but the centre-right wants an election in February.

Mr. Dini said tackling unemployment and reforming the judicial system, which he said was not working effectively or fast enough, were also priorities for the year ahead.

The prime minister said 1995 had been a difficult but positive year for Italy with the lira now stable and likely to strengthen in the coming year rather than weaken.

Unemployment remained a concern but would also improve and Mr. Dini announced an "alliance for jobs" which he hoped to put forward in January "if I am still in government."

"The economy, which is now strong and lively, is improving. Public finances, for the first time after so many years, are showing a clear improvement," he said.

Mr. Dini referred to high interest rates as "our sword of Damocles" but said he was confident they would fall in the year ahead as would inflation.

He was also optimistic that Italy would be able to join European Monetary Union from the onset in 1998.

"I have always said I don't believe in pessimism about Italy because you'll be wrong," Mr. Dini said, when asked what message he had for financial markets. "Don't be bearish on Italy."

Yeltsin concerned about air safety

MOSCOW (R) — President Boris Yeltsin expressed "extreme concern" about flight safety in Russia Saturday and asked the head of Aeroflot to come up with improvements, ITAR-TASS news agency quoted his spokesman as saying.

Mr. Yeltsin's press secretary Sergei Medvedev told TASS the president had told the head of Aeroflot International Airlines he was very worried about safety and that he wanted innovative proposals from him to improve the situation.

He appeared to be responding to Russia's latest air

disaster on Dec. 7, when an ageing domestic airliner carrying 97 people nosedived over 10,000 metres into a snow-covered, wooded hillside in the Far East.

Mr. Yeltsin was quoted as telling Marshal Yevgeny Shaposhnikov he was "extremely dissatisfied with the speed with which old planes are being replaced."

Agencies said Mr. Yeltsin had asked his government Friday to take urgent action to secure civil flight safety.

RIA news agency quoted Marshal Shaposhnikov, a former Soviet defence minister,

as saying some of the hundreds of domestic airlines created when Soviet carrier Aeroflot split up were concerned about safety but others only thought about profit.

"Quite a few firms are trying to squeeze the maximum profit out of the planes they got their hands on, with no regard for what will happen tomorrow," Marshal Shaposhnikov told RIA.

He said the tragedy was that these airlines, which had no chance of survival, would "murder people on the path to their extinction."

Former S. Korean leader indicted in connection with 1979 coup

SEOUL (Agencies) — Two former presidents, already embroiled in a huge corruption scandal, were indicted Thursday in connection with a 1979 coup that led both of them to power.

Still more charges are expected to follow as current President Kim Young-Sam tries to distance himself from his military-backed predecessors and rectify what he called the "shame and disgrace" that have marred South Korea's turbulent recent history.

Former President Chun Doo-Hwan, hospitalised late Wednesday after an 18-day hunger strike in jail, was charged with military insurrection as the alleged coup mastermind. The offense carries a mandatory death penalty, although it is unlikely to be imposed in Mr. Chun's case.

Roh Tae-Woo, in jail facing corruption charges, was indicted for abetting Mr. Chun, other generals also are expected to be charged; five were questioned Thursday.

Prosecution officials said treason charges will be added later against Mr. Chun in connection with a bloody crackdown several months after the coup on a pro-democracy uprising that left at least 240 people dead.

Mr. Chun and Mr. Roh, retired four-star generals, are the first ex-presidents to face charges for wrongdoing in office. They were childhood friends who graduated from the same prestigious military academy and remained buddies throughout their military careers.

The indictments followed the passage Tuesday of a special law waiving the statute of limitations by discounting the men's time in office. Mr. Chun's aides vowed to file suit, claiming the law violates the spirit of the constitution because it is retroactive.

Critics have accused Mr. Kim of trying to deflect attention from the corruption scandal that threatens to dirty him despite his claims of innocence.

Earlier this year, he called for letting history judge the coup. He changed his mind after Mr. Roh's slush-fund scandal broke in October, citing massive corruption involving the two former military leaders.

Sixteen years ago, Mr. Chun started the coup by arresting the army chief of staff, accusing him of involvement in the assassination of President Park Chung-Hee by his intelligence chief. The allegation was later proven to have been trumped up.

Mr. Roh faces 10 years of life in prison for allegedly taking bribes for government contracts to amass a \$650 million slush fund during his 1988-93 term. The new charges call for him to stay in prison at least seven more years.

In a trial that began Monday and will continue on Jan. 15, he claimed he only took "donations" from businessmen.

Mr. Chun, who started his hunger strike after his arrest on Dec. 3, claiming political vindictiveness, also is being investigated for allegedly building a similar slush fund during his 1980-88 term.

Mr. Roh's daughter, So-Young, was summoned for questioning Thursday about allegations that her father might have stashed cash in Swiss banks. She and husband Chey Tae-Won looked tense as they appeared at the Seoul prosecutors' office.

In 1992, the couple were given suspended one-year sentences by a U.S. court for depositing \$192,000 at 11 California banks in violation of U.S. currency laws.

U.S. prosecutors found that the money came from a Swiss bank, which aroused speculation in South Korea that Mr. Roh might have hidden money in Swiss accounts.

Akihito remembers Japan's 'heavy-hearted' year

TOKYO (AFP) — Emperor Akihito, marking his 62nd birthday Saturday, acknowledged 1995 was a horrible year because of a killer earthquake, a nerve-gas attack by a doomsday sect and the remembrance of Japan's militarist past.

The Japanese monarch said he had much to reflect upon on the 50th anniversary of the end of World War II, which he said had probably been started against the wishes of his father, the late Emperor Hirohito, and developed into a more horrible war than he envisioned.

"I spent this year with a heavy heart," he told a news conference, which was held Friday for public delivery on his birthday, recalling the Jan. 17 tremor which killed more than 5,500 in an industrial belt in and around Kobe.

Emperor Akihito, who ascended the throne upon his father's death in 1989, later greeted thousands of well-wishers in the Imperial Palace's celebrations and the emperor's birthday. The day

is designated a public holiday.

"I wish that the coming year would be a peaceful and good one," he said from the glassed-in balcony.

At the news conference, he labelled as "unthinkable and dreadful" the subway massacre, which killed 11 and injured some 5,500 on March 20 as part of a genocidal campaign by Aum Supreme Truth, led by yoga master Asahara and a dozen young scientists, including chemists, physicians, and an astro-physicist.

"In an age such as this one when science and technology are moving forward at a rapid pace, I think that it is extremely important to consider what kind of awareness those involved in science and technology have of the work they are undertaking," the emperor said.

He also said that as the year marked the 50th anniversary of the world war, "I devoted much of the time when I was not carrying out

official duties to reading and thinking about the past."

"As for World War II, I believe it can be said that things moved in a direction different from what Emperor Showa (Hirohito) wanted," he said, "and on this point, I can imagine how deeply Emperor Showa's heart was saddened."

The war was fought in the name of Hirohito, who was appointed the military commander in chief of Japan's previous constitution and worshipped as the demi-god of Japan's indigenous cult of Shinto.

Japan's reluctance to admit its wartime aggression in the rest of Asia has fuelled suspicions about its militarist revival. Conservative Japanese politicians continued to draw protests from abroad for making remarks glossing over Japan's past atrocities.

Japan's ruling coalition of Socialists and staunch conservatives struggled hard to work out a resolution marking the war anniversary. They compromised to express

"deep remorse" for the war but insist Japan took part in some of the "many instances of colonial rule and acts of aggression" in modern history.

Emperor Akihito said, "It was a year which has led us all, in our individual ways, to reflect on things past. I believe we must continue to tell the young generation of the ravages of war."

The emperor, whose role has been reduced to a ceremonial one by the U.S.-inspired post-war constitution, travelled this year to Hiroshima, Nagasaki and Okinawa which have struggled back from the ruins of war.

"I believe that more and more people will travel to such places as the Okinawan islands, which are surrounded by beautiful coral reefs, as well as other places where war once raged," he said, "and I hope that, while there, people will feel for the many who lost their lives in the war."

Colombia rules out terrorism in air crash

BUGA, Colombia (R) — Colombia ruled out terrorism as a possible cause of Wednesday's crash of an American Airlines passenger jet that killed 160 people.

"There are no signs that a terrorist attack occurred against American Airlines Flight 965," Foreign Minister Rodrigo Pardo said in a statement from the Colombian capital Bogota.

He said authorities had confirmed that the Boeing 757 was "several miles" off course when the crash occurred, but cautioned against wild speculation pending results of an official investigation.

The plane ploughed into the side of a mountain in a rural area outside Cali — Colombia's third largest city and headquarters of the Cali drug cartel — in an area where leftist guerrillas maintain a strong presence.

Media reports said the plane was 21 kilometres off course when it slammed into what newspapers have dubbed "the mountain of death."

The accident was the most deadly involving a U.S. carrier since 270 people died in the 1988 bombing of Pan Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland, on Dec. 21, 1988. The United States has blamed the Lockerbie bombing on Libya, but its perpetrators have never been arrested.

The only major bomb attack on a commercial airliner in Colombia occurred in November 1989, when a bomb planted by drug traffickers fighting extradition to the United States exploded aboard an Avianca flight over Bogotá killing 110 people.

Twenty U.S. officials are investigating Wednesday's crash of Flight 965 in Colombia, in which at least 46 U.S. citizens are believed to have died.

Investigators include officials from the State Department, the National Transportation Safety Board, the Federal Aviation Administration, the FBI and the Treasury Department's Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms.

The plane's flight recorder was recovered early Friday and could provide crucial in-

formation as to the cause of the crash.

Efraim Marin, chief spokesman for Colombia's Civil Aviation Authority, said the "black box" would be flown to the United States where various pieces of the investigation would ultimately be tied together.

Only four people, and a small dog named "Milagro" or "miracle" by a rescue worker who plucked her out of the wreckage of the plane early Friday, are known to have survived the crash.

It occurred four minutes before the plane, en route from Miami, was due to touch down in Cali. Rescue workers gave up hope of finding any more survivors late Friday.

"It's impossible to say at this point that there are any more survivors," one distraught rescue official said as he returned to this town from the scene of the crash.

Cali University Hospital spokesman Humberto Rupiales identified the only known survivors as Gonzalo Dussan, 37, his six-year-old daughter Michelle, Mercedes

Ramirez, 21, and Mauricio Reyes, 19.

He said they were all seated in the central part of the aircraft and were found trapped amid twisted metal that may have shielded them from suffering fatal injuries.

Dussan, a New Jersey man who was travelling with his wife and two children, told reporters that he was unaware of any problems with the plane before he was knocked unconscious when it hit the mountain. The fate of his wife and his son was unknown.

Hundreds of grieving family members were gathered late Friday outside a makeshift morgue in Buga's sports stadium waiting to see if they could identify relatives among the dead being ferried by helicopter from the site of the crash, nearly 12,000 feet (4,000 metres) above sea level.

Officials said only 15 bodies had been identified so far. Most of the victims were still caught in the wreckage strewn across the tree-lined San Jose Mountain.

Jordan Times

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Road sign to breakthrough

THERE ARE two major signs looming in the horizon which lend additional support to the proposition that a breakthrough on the Syrian front might be imminent. The first signal is the revelation by a top Israeli peace negotiator that a summit between Syrian President Hafez Assad and Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres is in the making and may take place within 3 to 4 months. The second, a no less important development, is the declaration by Mr. Peres that a referendum on the future of the Golan Heights would be "superfluous" because the public could express its views on it in the general elections set for October of 1996.

The new Israeli position constitutes a dramatic departure from earlier postures held firmly by the late Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, which made the proposed referendum a sine qua non for any deal with Damascus. The new stance also means that Mr. Peres is pressing ahead with determination to attain comprehensive peace in the region. In this sense the Israeli premier's vision for peace is bolder than Mr. Rabin's, at least by virtue of the fact that it has drawn strength from various Israeli constituencies which were shocked by the profile of extremism among their ranks in the wake of the Rabin assassination.

On the Syrian side, there has been a corresponding change and apparently a stronger commitment to sue for peace. "Syria is moving in a new direction," said French Foreign Minister Herve de Charette after visiting the Syrian capital recently. Both sides now realise that the extent of Israeli withdrawal from Syrian lands depends on the level and quality of peace that both parties can agree to.

Yet both parties may still have to reckon with, among other issues, water distribution which may end up being just as thorny as territory and security. Damascus may even bargain on this issue on behalf of Lebanon which controls water sources important for Israel. Such negotiations by proxy may ruffle feathers of some in Lebanon who would like to extract most favourable conditions for their own country when it comes to trading water for peace.

The Lebanese sensitivity on this issue may surface more visibly when the time comes for concluding peace treaties with the Jewish state. That is why there can still be some currents along the way but it is doubtful that they will be strong enough to change the course of peace talks per se.

ARABIC PRESS COMMENTARIES

AL RA'I daily Saturday voiced backing for His Majesty King Hussein's call for a dialogue among the various political groups and factions in Iraq with the purpose of safeguarding their country's sovereignty and territorial integrity. Such dialogue will help unify the Iraqi people's ranks and offers the different factions a chance to chart plans for their future, said the paper. Jordan, added the daily, is concerned with the deteriorating living conditions of the Iraqis on the one hand, and concerned over foreign hostile powers trying to divide the country on the other. Jordan is naturally concerned because the Kingdom has always considered Iraq its strategic depth, and has served as the sole outlet for the Iraqi people, continued the paper. It also noted that any development in Iraq is bound to have its repercussions and impact on Jordan, and that failing to find a solution to Iraq's present predicament, the Iraqis would be inviting the major powers in the world to find for them a solution that favours their own interests. In the light of inter-related interests between Iraq and Jordan, said the paper, Jordan's concern over Iraq's future can by no means be considered as interference in that country's internal affairs.

TWO FACTORS continue to encourage neighbours of the Arab countries to launch aggression and seize Arab territory, said Ali Safadi, a writer in Al Dustoor. First, the Arab regimes are deeply divided and weak and not ready to unite in the face of the common challenge, and second the Arab countries have failed to build bridges of understanding and cooperation with the new independent nations in Africa, thus leaving the arena for others to do so at the expense of Arab interests, said the writer in discussing Eritrea's occupation of Yemeni islands in the Red Sea. Noting that Iran's occupation of the United Arab Emirates islands in 1971 had failed to unite the Arab countries efforts to recover the lost territory, the writer said he does not expect the Arabs to take a collective action against Eritrea either.

Sunday's Economic Pulse

By Dr. Fahed Al Fanek

Objectives and policies for 1996

THE YEAR 1996 will be the fifth year in the current seven-year economic adjustment programme, agreed upon with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), (1992-1998), or the first year in the new three-year structural adjustment programme (1996-1998), which differs from the original programme by making more emphasis on certain objectives, such as higher economic growth rate, and higher reserve of foreign exchange with the Central Bank.

Economic objectives for the coming year will be a sustained GDP (gross domestic product) growth of 5.5 to 6.5 per cent, containment of annual rate of inflation within 4 to 5 per cent, reduction of the current external account deficit by three percentage points to less than ten per cent of GDP, and the augmentation of Central Bank's net reserve of foreign exchange to the equivalent of 2.4 months of imports.

Fiscal policy, as the draft budget of 1996 amply demonstrated, will seek to further reduce the budget deficit before grants while enhancing the quality of public expenditures. Fiscal policy will be supported by a firm and unrelenting monetary stance.

Structural policies will consist of tax reforms to enhance revenue elasticity and efficiency of the tax system, and a switch to indirect monetary control and development of monetary programming techniques.

The financial, exchange, and trade systems will be further reformed. Social safety-net measures to include better targeting of expenditures through wider use of coupon-based system, for selected basic food items, and to provide direct income support to poor families.

Most reforms, agreed upon between the IMF and the government, have already been implemented on timely basis. However, some agreed reforms are still pending, but not for long. The following reforms are supposed to soon be put into action, which means that 1996 will be quite a busy year with many developments to watch out for:

— Formulation of civil service reform programme.

— Policies and measures related to the release of the

Economic Structural Agricultural Loan (ESAL).

— Restructuring of Royal Jordanian Airline.

— Synchronisation of sales tax with custom duty structure.

— Simplification of customs duty/fees structure and payments.

— Increasing public sector savings by at least 1.4 per cent of GDP through containment of current capital outlays.

— Extending sales tax to the whole sale level by the end of 1996.

— Introduction of foreign exchange interbank market during 1996.

— Reduction of customs duty, perhaps as of January 1, 1996.

The government revealed that the new three-year programme for economic adjustment is underway with the blessing of the IMF and major donor countries. The programme is not exactly new. It is a continuation of the present programme which just finished the fourth year. The new programme will have indicators for three years 1996-1998, but the criteria conditions will be for one year at a time. The main features of the new programme are higher growth rates, up to 6.5 per cent a year, and an extra \$500 million to be added to the Central Bank reserves. A major assumption is that capital transfers to Jordan will intensify in the coming three years in the form of grants, soft loans, private investments, tourism proceeds, expatriate remittances, and reversal of capital flight.

The dinar will be stronger in 1996 which will spur confidence, reverse the trend of dollarisation, and enhance investments.

If the three-year programme would actually be implemented successfully, Jordan will emerge in 1999 as a financially independent, and economically viable country. The prize is worth the efforts and sacrifices which must be explained to the people to gain popular support and overcome obstacles.

Japan hopes for recovery in new year — again

By Linda Sieg
Reuters

TOKYO — One year ago on Tuesday, Japan's new central bank governor Yasuo Mutsushita issued a stern warning in his first public comments in the job — don't be too optimistic about economic recovery.

He was right to be cautious.

Instead of the budding recovery hoped for as the old year faded, 1995 brought a massive earthquake in Western Japan, a shocking nerve gas attack on Tokyo's commuter-packed subway, a surge in the yen's value and a stock market plunge.

Those calamities were followed by a string of banking failures and the debacle of bond losses at Daiwa Bank, igniting fears that Japan's authorities might prove powerless to avert a financial system crisis.

Now once again as the year draws to a close, hopes are growing that a recovery — albeit a modest one — is finally in sight after four years of near-zero growth.

"The economy has begun to grope in the direction of recovery," an economic planning agency official told reporters last Friday, when the agency released

its monthly economic report.

Central bankers also predict that the elusive recovery will materialise in 1996, although they anticipate only modest growth and they are not expected to tighten credit policy soon.

"We can't exclude the possibility the economy may fall due to an unexpected external shock, but for the time being we think that we can attain growth in the two per cent range."

Government planners have set a target of real economic growth of 2.5 per cent in the fiscal year from next April.

Private economists also say that, barring unforeseen adversity like another yen surge, 1996 will bring some relief, largely thanks to fiscal and monetary steps taken in 1995.

"The disasters of the first quarter... prompted finance ministry officials to comment that Japan was 'fighting for its very survival,'" said Jesper Koll, chief economist at JP Morgan in Tokyo. "So you got drastic action."

When Mr. Mutsushita took over as Bank of Japan governor last December, pundits were wondering when in the new year he might boost the bank's key lending rate to curb incipient inflation.

Instead, after the dollar's plunge and a nosedive in the Tokyo stock market scuttled the fledgling recovery, the central bank cut its official discount rate in April to one per cent.

In September, after a string of credit union failures, the nation's first post-war bank failure and the Daiwa Bank scandal over huge trading losses by a New York bond trader, the central bank again slashed its key lending rate, this time to 0.5 per cent.

And in a shift to traditional policy, the central bank has kept key short-term rates below the discount rate to ensure liquidity for troubled financial institutions and to boost bank profits to help them cope with their mountains of bad loans.

"What is different now is that monetary policy has been eased 'all out,'" Mr. Koll said. "It's boosted confidence."

The finance ministry also pried open its coffers, unveiling a 14 trillion yen (\$138 billion) stimulative package in September — Japan's biggest ever public spending spree.

The yen, meanwhile, has eased back from its record high of 79.75 yen to the dollar etched in April to around 101 to the dollar now.

That, along with the record low interest rates, has helped companies recover confidence and plan more capital spending.

Corporate profits have also posted double-digit growth, though largely on the back of restructuring which is keeping joblessness at record high levels despite improved earnings.

How substantial this year's recovery will be, however, depends partly on how prepared the private sector is to pick up the slack now that more hefty public spending looks unlikely.

Possible currency gyrations are also a wild card. "If the yen does appreciate back to past 90 (to the dollar), consumer confidence and corporate confidence will take another hit," Mr. Koll said.

Unforeseen disasters aside, 1996 could be a critical year for a long-overdue shake-out in a broad range of industries from manufacturing to services, as those who bite the bullet and restructure pull ahead of their more cautious rivals.

Next year "will bring greater divergence between the survivors — companies who are meaner and leaner after four years of deflation — and those who are lagging behind," Mr. Koll said.

Change the rent law

By Dr. Yusuf Mansur

ACCORDING TO the generally accepted supply and demand economic model, if there is a surplus of something then its price must fall. If this is true, then why does the housing market continue to exhibit such high purchase and rental prices even though there are many empty lots in and around Amman (the centre of the housing boom) and innumerable empty houses that are for sale? The answer lies in our spending nature and in the Rent Law, but first let's review the construction sector.

The business of construction is a sizeable portion of Jordan's overall economic activity. In 1993 spending on construction made up 6.75 per cent of the GDP (gross domestic product) at market prices, and spending on construction material alone was JD 223.9 million or 18.9 per cent of the industrial production index. Between 1992 and 1993, over 8,000 housing units were constructed with over 81 per cent of them located in the West Amman area, where land prices can be as high as JD 500 per square metre. Fifty per cent of these houses remain unoccupied today. Indeed, we do not have a shortage of housing even though real estate prices do not seem to want to fall and house rents remain high relative to the per capita income.

Our per capita income of JD 150 per month is very low and does not match our spending. How would one pay for wedding costs, furniture, car, children's education, etc. with such low income? From savings. We rely on wealth and accumulated savings to finance our major expenditures. You sell that piece of land to marry-off your child. Then, you sell that other piece to send your son/daughter to school abroad, and so forth. It is wealth we rely on and not income. In other words, though one may own lands that would make him a millionaire, he chooses not to sell it all and sells only part of it to finance his immediate needs. Furthermore, the opportunity cost of holding land is very small. That is there are very few investments in Jordan whose return can match the capital gain on land which makes holding onto a piece of land not so expensive and definitely rational. Also, due to the large influx of refugees at different stages of our recent past, land prices have ballooned from almost nothing to incredibly high levels. Whether we like to admit it or not, refugees increase the price of land and property. Therefore, a seller is always cautious about selling too much land and tends to want to wait, in expectation of another crisis that would increase his/her property value. Land prices

would have definitely fallen to reasonable levels, had we been big spenders, had we had a vital economy, and had our area been peaceful and tranquil.

Jordan's Housing Rental Law, which is so devoid of any economic sense, is a major contributor to the high rent of real estate in Jordan. According to this law as soon as one rents a house or an apartment it becomes practically his/hers and then the heirs' thereafter, who continue to rent the property at the same old rate that the first person paid possibly decades earlier. Thus, the landlord becomes a fixed income earner whose ordeal becomes even sadder when faced with double digit inflation such as Jordan has suffered in the past. The dinar of 20 years ago went further than today's and it bought more. A person who built property 20 years ago and rented it to others in order to live off the rental income would be starving by now. Many of these landlords are at the mercy of their tenants who will not pay rent that is commensurate with inflation nor leave these dwellings because they are priced well below the market price. Some tenants have gone as far as asking their landlords for huge amounts of money in return for their evacuation of the property.

So, what do would-be housing investors do? After all, people are rational economic agents and tend to do what is right for them. Some of these investors went into furnished housing rental which, unlike unfurnished housing, is subject to legal and enforceable contracts. Additionally, since the renters of furnished dwellings tend to be transient, the landlord needn't worry about sudden inflationary shocks. Other would-be landlords went to the selling business as they realised that they could build and sell and thus have access to their capital and profits without putting up with our non-market oriented rental law.

One reason that this law has survived for so long is because on the surface one is led to believe that poor people benefit from it. However, it has caused a shortage of rental property in Jordan and an excess of sale property to the extent that people who want to rent a house or an apartment are faced with very high rents even though there are empty housing units everywhere. The present law is harming new tenants by helping create a shortage in the rental property sector and it does not help buyers of property because of the reasons delineated above on spending and the opportunity cost of holding property. Changing this law will be a win-win situation to all the players.

Let's not wait too long.

By George Joffe

IN THE wake of his unexpectedly comprehensive victory in Algeria's presidential elections on Nov. 16, Liamine Zeroual must feel that he now has the world in his hand. With an electoral turnout of 74.92 per cent, according to official figures, and with his personal vote reaching a surprising 61.34 per cent, Algeria's past and future president can now face his five-year term secure in the knowledge that this time it will be very difficult for anyone to question his legitimacy. The regime had, after all, only sought a minimum turnout of 59 per cent — just above the level of the aborted legislative elections of December 1991, when the FIS was poised to win control of the National Assembly. Although there was never much doubt that President Zeroual would win, no one anticipated the size of his actual victory.

Confirmation that the majority of Algerians had actually voted for the incumbent was provided by the reluctant reactions of the three parties which called for a boycott of the elections. The FIS' representatives abroad, after claiming that the election was a fraud because over 300,000 security personnel were required to ensure public order at the 33,783 polling stations and that the

participation rate had been close to 37 per cent, rather than the 75 per cent officially claimed, then announced that they would not be prepared to enter "global and just" negotiations with the existing state power. The FLN leader, Abdul Hamid Mehri, claimed that, although the vote had been rigged, there was no denying that Algerians had voted for "civil peace."

Where does the FIS go now

Mafoud Nahnah, the leader of the moderate Islamist movement Hamas, who has always collaborated with the regime and has been disowned by the FIS in consequence, called for peace. His call carried added weight because, as a candidate himself, he won a surprising 25.38 per cent of the vote, making him now potentially the major opposition figure on the Algerian political scene and a possible rival to the imprisoned FIS leadership, since he seems to have captured much of the former FIS vote. He also warned the parties which had called on the population to boycott the elections that they would now have to rally to the regime, whilst at the same time warning of

"serious irregularities" in the election process itself.

The path ahead for President Zeroual, now fortified with a popular mandate, thus seems clear; he can now reopen the negotiations with the FIS leadership which broke down earlier this year. After all, he now has a much stronger bargaining position and the FIS has been forced to realise the vast majority of Algerians reject further violence. In any case, the two sides are not so far apart, for Abbasi Madani, one of the imprisoned FIS leaders, has accepted the principle of democracy, a negotiated settlement and a transitional period before new legislative elections take place. The original sticking point was over a formal renunciation of violence by the FIS before the imprisoned leadership would be released. The proposed agreement only failed because the FIS' ruling body, the Majlis Al Shura, which is in hiding or with the FIS's armed wing, the AIS, would not countenance the form that the renunciation would have taken.

Now the president can return to the negotiating table, reinforced by the knowledge that the elections were an implicit rejection

of the FIS's continued espousal of violence within the negotiating process. The FIS and, more particularly, the GIA had warned that those who voted would face death and that they would disrupt the electoral process itself. In the event, no incidents of violence were reported and Algerians made it clear, by turning out in such large numbers, that they refused to be intimidated any more.

The president is certain to demand that the Islamist movement formally renounce violence as a prior part of any new negotiated deal and the FIS will find it much harder to resist his call now. It may even have to accept a change of name as part of the price of entering the legal political arena once again. It is almost certain that he will also warn them that, if they do not come to terms, the regime will go ahead with legislative elections in their absence in the near future — something which the French government has been urging Algiers to do in any event.

Such a development would spell the end of any claim by the FIS to enjoy popular support, particularly if the turn-out were again so high. And the FIS knows

this, hence its willingness to offer new negotiations despite its disparaging of the validity of the presidential elections. Nor is the FIS alone in this, for the other major legal opposition parties also realise that they have been marginalised by the regime's electoral success — hence their declared willingness to support "realistic" negotiations, to use FLN leader Abdul Hamid Mehri's phrase. Hocine Ait Ahmad, the Berber FIS leader, has also admitted that the time has come to concentrate on winning peace, whatever the political sacrifices involved.

Restraints on the president

Yet the president is not quite as powerful as his overwhelming victory might suggest. He cannot afford to ignore the legal opposition parties, even if they miscalculated over the boycott issue. They still represent a powerful segment of public opinion on which he may have to rely if he faces real opposition within the regime to his proposals for ending Algeria's political crisis. He still has to deal with the extremists inside the army and the administration who find any

suggestion of compromise with the Islamists very difficult to accept. They can also claim to be the victors in the poll, for the presidential candidate was their appointee and it was only after army approval last September that Liamine Zeroual decided to join the electoral race. The popular vote, they will argue, was also a vote for their policies of repression and a negotiated settlement should now be made only from a position of official strength, if it is to be made at all.

It is true that President Zeroual has spent many months putting his own supporters in power throughout the army and the administration, not least his own security adviser, who is also his main negotiator, Mohammed Bitchine. Yet General Lamari is still chief-of-staff and has his own supporters within the army command and the security services. He is still a potential king-maker and one lesson that all Algerians know only too well is that, ultimately, it is the army that decides, whatever the democratic process might propose. There is still a long way to go before that reality changes and Algeria can look forward to democratic legitimacy and peace. However, for the first time in four years, such a future has become a realistic option.

Middle East International

The Jerash hippodrome: Understanding and restoring one of the world's finest Roman racing circuits

By Rami G. Khouri

Special to the Jordan Times

This is the first of two articles on the work that has been taking place at the hippodrome at Jerash during the past decade. The following article is on the excavations, history and restoration of the hippodrome structure.

JERASH — After a decade of painstaking but meticulous work, a team of Jordanian workers led by Polish archaeologist and architect Antoni Ostrasz has clarified the history and architecture of one of the single largest structures in Jordan to be handed down to us from antiquity: the hippodrome at Jerash. Their continuing excavations and partial reconstruction will soon result in Jordan's having perhaps the best preserved and most complete — though also the smallest — Roman hippodrome in the world today.

A building used primarily for chariot racing was called a hippodrome in the eastern, Hellenised Roman provinces, while the same structure was called a "circus" in the western parts of the Roman Empire. The hippodrome at Jerash measures some 245 metres long and 51 metres wide on the inside, but its shrouded history had always generated debate among scholars about its precise construction date and duration of use.

Dr. Ostrasz' fieldwork has conclusively ended the debate. Coin, ceramics and epigraphic evidence indicates that the structure was under construction in the second half of the 2nd century AD (certainly not before 140/141 AD, to judge by posthumous coins of Faustina I (wife of Antoninus Pius, struck in Bostra, southern Syria.); it was completed in the very early 3rd century at the latest (some time before 212 AD, to judge by inscriptions fragments from stone altars that once stood above the stalls, and that mentioned the Roman Emperor Geta, who was murdered by his brother Caracalla in 212 AD). The hippodrome had a very short life as a racing facility, because its south-west section seems to have sagged and then partly collapsed due to poor architectural design and construction work. By the end of the 3rd century, its racing days had ended, and it was being used as the main ceramics production centre of Late Roman Jerash. It continued to play this role throughout the Late Roman and Byzantine periods, until the early 7th century, when irreparable earthquake damage finally caused its total abandonment.

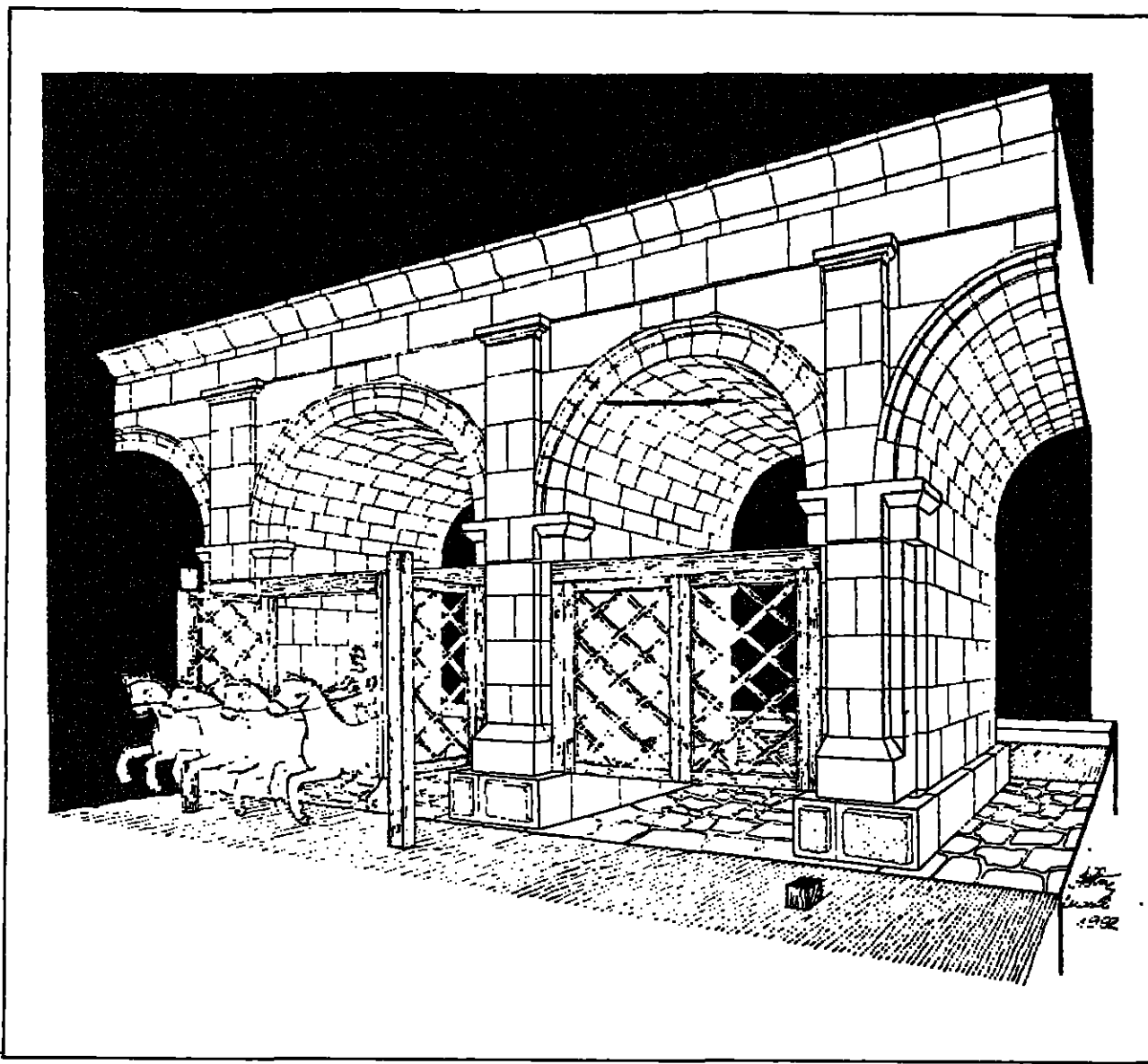
In its working life, the hippodrome was a handsome and functional structure that accommodated 15,000 spectators. Its external wall stood some 13 metres high, and the lowest row of seats was just 3.5 metres above the arena's track. Though its size ranks it as the smallest of the 43

Roman circuses known from their architectural remains, its capacity ranks it as number ten. The audience moved in and out of the seating areas through 17 vomitoria, or arched entrances that provided access to the lower and upper seats. The spectators sat on 17 rows of seats, which were built on stepped arches. Several rows of seats are being reconstructed in the south-east corner of the hippodrome. The tribunal at the finish of the races was located approximately in the middle of the eastern seats. No evidence has been found for special boxes or seats for dignitaries, as was common in Roman theatres or in other circuses built in residential cities of the emperors.

The races were conducted by drivers in chariots drawn by four horses each, racing in a counter-clockwise direction. The arena was originally designed for ten-chariot races, as we know from the ten stalls and also from a small bulge in the right-hand track; this bulge is near the point where the chariots started to race according to their own tactics, about 75 metres north of the stalls. However, due to the early deterioration of the south-west part of the hippodrome, only five chariots seem to have ever raced at one time at Jerash. The ten stalls were separated into two sets of five by a larger pavilion, and their entire northern facade was nicely decorated with pilasters, a simple upper moulding, and a cornice.

A central stone-built structure some 145 metres long (now very poorly preserved only in its foundations) acted as a barrier that divided the arena into two tracks, with wide spaces for making the turns at the north and south ends. The length of each complete lap around the arena was about 300 metres, compared to 680 metres for the largest known Roman circus (the Circus Maximus, in Rome). Historical evidence recounts that races at the Circus Maximus comprised seven laps, or about 5000 metres, but it is not known if this was a standard distance for races throughout the Empire.

A large, 15-metre-high stone tower at the south-east corner occupied the space between the eastern seats and the easternmost stall; there was a similar tower at the west end of the stalls. The towers provided strength at the hippodrome's corner, and also had a utilitarian function, in antiquity as again today: internal stairs allowed offi-



Perspective view of the stalls as they would have appeared in Roman times. (Courtesy A. Ostrasz).

cial to give the starting signal from above the stalls and to view the race from the top of the tower. Some of the stairs of the south-east tower have been rebuilt to give visitors access to the actually restored level (about half the original height) of the south-east tower, from where they can enjoy a fine view of the entire hippodrome.

As Dr. Ostrasz notes, "the architect of the hippodrome (at Jerash) designed a building that was functionally useful and aesthetically graceful," but his application of construction technology is less impress-

ive, for the hippodrome is an example of exceptionally poor building technique. The structure's relatively small size and short life were partly a consequence of its location. When it was being built in the second half of the 2nd century, it had to be fitted into a space between the existing cemetery and South Gate to the north, and Hadrian's Arch to the south. It could not encroach on land to the west due to the steep slope of the valley or to the east due to the axis of the South Gate-to-Hadrian's Arch road. The architect also had to deal with the severe

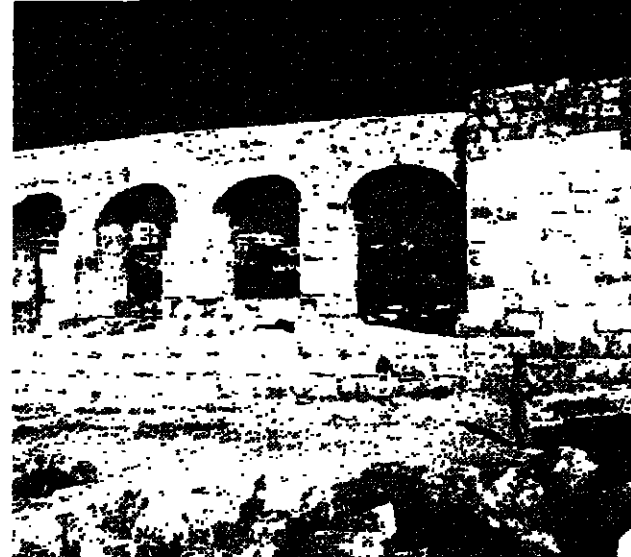
westward slope of the plot of land handed to him, with bedrock at the west side some seven metres below its level on the east side. The architect had at his disposal only enough space for an arena of 245 metres length. He built a part of the eastern foundations of the hippodrome directly on bedrock, but in the west decided to use a massive, three-metre-deep platform of earth fill on which he placed the foundations of the stalls, the arena and the seating area. The masonry of the entire structure was of poor quality, and the foundation walls in the

south-west section were too narrow and weak to play their role.

Consequently, soon after the structure was complete — or even during the final stages of work — the south-west side of the building started to sag, as the earth fill below settled and shifted. According to evidence that he has uncovered, Dr. Ostrasz believes that "we may entertain the possibility that the very inauguration of chariot racing in the hippodrome of Gerasa (the Roman name for Jerash) took place in a building that was already partly ruined."



General view of the hippodrome in mid-1995, looking south. (Photo by Ostrasz).



Antoni Ostrasz in front of the reconstructed stalls at the south end of the hippodrome (Photo by Rami Khouri)

Several findings support this hypothesis. The ten stalls from which horse-drawn chariots entered the arena simultaneously would have been outfitted with a gate system that opened all ten gates together; but only the five eastern stalls had the full gate system installed, the excavations have proved. The builders seem to have decided not to install gates on the five western stalls at the very end to the construction works, probably because they had already realised that the western side of the hippodrome was already failing. Also, the chariots would have entered the stalls on an external ramp, but there is only evidence today for a supporting wall for the ramp along the five eastern stalls, and not the five western ones — probably for the same reason. The shifting and settling of the earth fill can be ascertained today by the unusual slope of the foundation walls of the five western stalls, which have dropped 28 centimetres below the level of the central pavilion and the eastern stalls.

The excavations showed that from the late 3rd to early 7th centuries, most of the chambers of the building were used primarily as dumping sites for misfired pottery, but also to house kilns and installations associated with the ceramics industry, and in some cases even as domestic quarters. The work to date has retrieved around four million pottery sherds, all of which have been screened in a preliminary manner and are being studied by Ina Kehrberg, who has studied pottery and glass artifacts at Jerash for the past decade. The beautiful and quite rare, uninterrupted sequence of ceramics will provide a great deal of new information about the social, technological and economic history of Jerash between the late 3rd and early 7th centuries. Dr. Ostrasz told the Jordan Times in a recent interview at Jerash. Some ceramics found here include forms not seen anywhere else in Jerash. The famous "Jerash bowls" that are well attested throughout the ancient city but whose place of production had never been identified are now known to have been produced in the hippodrome, where the excavators discovered many unfired fragments of Jerash bowls. Also interesting was the identification of the use of ceramic and glass flaked tools in the Late Roman and Byzantine periods.

The building suffered from the 551 earthquake (possibly) and the 659/660 earthquake, but the main destruction occurred during the 749 earthquake; this is especially visible in the south-east section. After that date, the site seems to have supported only intermittent squatter occupation. A single coin has been found from the early 8th century AD, and little else

to indicate sustained human activity at the site after this period. Another probable cause of the town's decline was a sudden drop in population, perhaps due to an epidemic of bubonic (?) plague. The excavators found skeletal remains of around 60 individuals thrown into a single chamber and another 120 in another chamber, including women, men and children of all ages. This seems to have occurred around the mid-7th century AD, to judge by coin evidence. The manner in which the collective burials occurred suggests sudden, large-scale deaths due to plague, but other explanations for the mass burial may yet surface.

The cemetery adjacent to the external side of the long eastern wall, near Hadrian's Arch, also has been examined during the past decade. The original Roman and Byzantine period cemetery extended from the South Gate of Jerash to 400 metres south of Hadrian's Arch (some cut tomb chambers are still visible along the sides of the modern tarmac road in the area between Hadrian's Arch and the main entrance to the visitor's centre). Just north of Hadrian's Arch and Bishop Marianos Church, eight subterranean Roman period tombs have been excavated, though all had been robbed in antiquity. Three can be visited today, entered down steps carved into the bedrock. The cemetery started in the 1st century AD at the latest, but was partly disused as such when Hadrian's Arch was built in 129/130 AD. A mausoleum built above ground was dismantled at the time of the arch's construction; 35 of the mausoleum's stones were found inside one of the underground tombs and also amidst the internal core fill of Hadrian's Arch.

The Jerash hippodrome is emerging as a particularly important monument because of its good state of preservation, particularly its stalls on the south. No other known hippodrome has such well preserved stalls, especially in terms of their decorative and architectural detail. Now that the stalls are being reconstructed largely using the original stones that were scattered on the ground, the hippodrome will soon be the most complete and best preserved example of such Roman architecture in the world.

The work Dr. Ostrasz directs is being conducted and funded entirely by the Department of Antiquities of Jordan. The department plans to continue the work to document the site's history, stabilise the entire structure, make it presentable and safe for visitors, and protect it from any possible encroachment by private construction or public works on the still vulnerable west side of the hippodrome.

King: Jordan not seeking to impose any solution on Iraqis

(Continued from page 1)

Hussein Kamel came to us but he was not transformed into spy for Jordan. He already knew Jordan's support for Iraq. We welcomed him and gave him protection. We meant to send a message to the Iraqis that their country was more important than persons and all other considerations.

As to the missile shipment it is not a simple matter. The U.N. and other concerned parties contacted us to warn us that it was a shipment of intercontinental ballistic missiles and not merely a shipment of ordinary rockets on their way to Baghdad via Amman. They estimated the shipment at \$25 million. What could I do in this situation? Was it reasonable for me to overlook this serious matter?

Q: Some people say Iraq had nothing to do with this shipment which could have been arranged by an arms agent?

A: Is it reasonable to see a person paying \$25 million to get unguaranteed transaction?

Q: Will the Iraqi opposition groups convene in Jordan next month?

A: So far there is nothing clear about the meeting... we focus our attention now on the Iraqi parties to meet and the meeting could be anywhere and not necessarily in Jordan.

Q: Are there Arab countries that are coordinating matters with you?

A: None. Let me also add that if the Arabs want to save Iraq they should transcend their suspicions and direct their attention to saving the Iraqi people one way or another.

Q: Do you believe that Hussein Kamel aspires to substitute Saddam?

A: I did not nominate Hussein Kamel because he does not have the qualities of a leader. Hussein Kamel is an Iraqi young man who sought refuge in Jordan.

Q: When you attended Yitzhak Rabin's funeral you looked deeply moved despite his military career and the massacres he committed against the Arabs. How do you explain this?

A: Rabin defended his country as we did our country, and we reached with him a peace for which he deserves appreciation from all parties. With his contributions the Palestinians have

attained their objectives. His courage and positive attitude cost him his life and therefore it was natural that we are saddened at his death.

Q: You looked excessively affected by his death, something which invited many strong reactions.

A: Ironically I still receive messages from around the world from people appreciating my humanitarian stand. I am surprised that this stand is not appreciated by some Arabs.

Q: What is your stand now vis-a-vis the question of Jerusalem following the U.S. Congress's recognition of the city as the capital of Israel?

A: The Congress's recognition would lead to the transfer of the U.S. embassy to the city. I hope that this decision will never be enforced. I believe that Jerusalem is a city for all believers in God and should not be under the sovereignty of any one. Still I continue to believe in the Arab sovereignty over East Jerusalem hoping that it will be transformed into a symbol of peace where all can coexist.

Q: What do you expect from the Israeli-Syrian negotiations?

A: We have always worked

for a comprehensive and just peace that can restore the rights for all parties. We hope that negotiations will be positive.

Q: How are the Syrian-Jordanian relations now?

A: We strive to remove all temporary tensions in our relations with Syria and we believe there is no justification for tension except if Jordan is required to serve as a mere card in the hands of others. We reject such state of affairs in our foreign relations.

Q: How are the relations with Egypt?

A: Egypt and Jordan have normal relations. Let me ask you who stood by Egypt and who helped to bring back Egypt into the Arab fold. We have always considered Egypt as the Major Arab sister state and a dear country for all.

Q: You reacted strongly to the Egyptian foreign minister's remarks during the Amman economic summit in which he said Jordan was moving fast towards normal relations with Israel, something that cause people to believe that there was some sort of rivalry between the two countries.

A: Egypt is Egypt, and

Jordan is Jordan and there can be no cause for any rivalry between them. We have no ambition to assume the leadership but we rather try to exert efforts for the good of all in this region.

Q: What about the Jordanian-Palestinian relations and the truth about the confederation?

A: Thank God you asked this question. Why do people accept to discuss a Jordanian-Palestinian confederation and do not favour to talk about a federation in Iraq. Federation is a stronger form of unity. Why do people accept confederation with Palestine and do not favour a federation within Iraq considering it as a means of dismembering that country?

Q: Where has the confederation with the Palestinians reached so far?

A: It is true that a draft Jordanian-Palestinian confederation does exist. Abu Ammar told me it is in his pocket. But I replied: Leave it there until the Palestinian people have settled in their homeland and decided what is best for themselves. I meant that we cannot pre-judge matters now. But the project is on the cards.

Q: What about the Jorda-

nian passports to the Palestinians? Does not this contradict with your earliest decision to sever ties with the West Bank?

A: We are bound by the Jordanian constitution and Jordanian laws. All those who are legally qualified to get passports will be able to get them. But this does not mean denying these people their own identity and nationality. There have been mistakes and we are trying to put matters right. That is all.

But as we are trying to become a united Arab Nation, it is right to deny people who have lived all their lives in Jordan documents that guarantee their dignity and equality? Jordanians are all equal in rights and duties regardless of their religion and origin and they form part of this country until they choose otherwise. We do not want to see full fledged citizens and others without nationality as is the case in some countries. This therefore does not conflict with the decision of severing ties with the West Bank.

Q: Jordan's relations with Iran deteriorating following the expulsion of the Iranian diplomat from Amman.

A: I do not believe that

these relations have deteriorated because our dialogue is continuing. I received the Iranian ambassador who was accompanied by the diplomat whose tour of duty ended here. We are keen to maintain the dialogue so that each side realises the position of the other.

Q: The U.S. defence secretary is scheduled to visit you next month to discuss your arms needs. What are these needs in the peace era?

A: Ours are like the needs of other countries which strive to acquire military strength at par with others to deter any aggression from any source. The visit is for modernising the Jordanian Armed Forces weapons so that Jordan can continue to safeguard its security and assume its role in preserving the peace and keeping the peace in other parts of the world.

Q: Is there a chance for you pardoning Laith Shbeilat, the president of the Jordanian Engineers Association?

A: The case of Laith Shbeilat is legal and not political. As to pardon we will see what the coming days have in store for us.

Q: How do you view Jor-

dan's relations with Kuwait?

A: I will not say more than I had already said before. Jordan will not make more moves in this direction. We have done our part and the matter is up to the Kuwaiti brothers. When they decide to normalise their relations with us we will welcome the move.

Q: What about relations with Riyadh?

A: They are normal. Hopefully I will meet King Fahd once he is well enough for meeting me and I believe this will take place soon.

Q: During the Gulf crisis you revived the old title of Sharif prompting some people to believe that this is nostalgia for ruling the Arabian peninsula what do you say about that?

A: The Sharif title preceded the King's title and it does not have any connotation nor does it harbour any ambition. I never was one of those ambitious people craving for expansion. I believe in God and life after death. Each one of us lives his days according to the will of God. I believe also in nations and that individuals' efforts should be dedicated for the good of nations and not for idolising persons.

Enron sees Israel-Jordan LNG venture by mid 1996

AMMAN (R) — The U.S. energy firm Enron Corp. said Friday it hoped to sign a \$300 million joint venture with Israeli and Jordanian investors by mid-1996 to supply them with Qatari gas from 2000.

Enron Development chairman and chief executive officer Rebecca Mark told Reuters the firm was putting together a joint venture with Israeli and Jordanian partners for setting a \$300 million regasification plant to bring Qatari liquefied natural gas (LNG) to Israel and Jordan and the neighbouring areas.

Ms. Mark said the plant would act as a transit point for up to 2.5-3.0 million tonnes annually of LNG to be shipped from Qatar.

"We hope contracts will be finalised in six months," she added after talks over the last few days with Israeli and Jordanian officials and investors.

Ms. Mark said the first Qatari gas would be delivered to Jordan and Israel by mid-2000.

Qatar gave Enron approval to market 5.0 million tonnes of LNG annually from a plant

and \$4 billion joint venture in Qatar. Ms. Mark said under the accord Enron could export to Israel, Jordan and neighbouring countries, excluding the Mediterranean.

Ms. Mark said Enron had signed a preliminary joint venture agreement in Tel Aviv this week to "develop, own and operate" the estimated \$300 million, regasification plant with Israel's Mashav Ltd and Danker Group.

Enron and Israel's energy ministry signed a memorandum of understanding in October in Amman for the supply of at least two million tonnes a year of Qatari natural gas to Israel.

Jordanian private investors and officials are hopeful the plant will be located at Aqaba on Jordan's Red Sea coast, citing availability of land, a key location and the project's value in cementing the 1994 Jordan-Israel peace treaty.

While Jordan is pushing for Aqaba, Israeli Energy Minister Gonen Segov was quoted this week as saying he proposed the Mediterranean

coast, citing security reasons. The decision on the location is expected in January, allowing Jordanian investors to enter on an equal 25 per cent equity share with Israeli investors and Enron holding a 50 per cent holding, Jordanian investors and officials said.

"Enron will hold a significant direct stake and the other partners will hold significant interests," Ms. Mark said.

Jordan is expected to contract half a million tonnes of LNG once a decision on Aqaba is taken, Jordanian officials said.

Enron, having examined sites in both the Israeli Red Sea resort of Eilat and Aqaba, has yet to decide where the plant will be built but appears to be inclined towards Aqaba, Jordanian investors said.

"Maybe in Aqaba. There is much less space in Eilat, and Aqaba is a likely site that we find very attractive," Ms. Mark said when asked when the plant was likely to be built.

Tunisia's parliament passes \$7.6b budget

TUNIS (R) — The Tunisian parliament Saturday passed a 7.23 billion dinars (\$7.61 billion) budget for the year 1996, up by 9.6 per cent over 1995.

The budget forecasts revenues of 5.235 billion dinars, and 1.995 billion dinars borrowing on the domestic and international markets to pay an estimated 1.61 billion dinars of public debts and servicing in 1996 and to fill in the budget deficit.

The net budget deficit is expected to reach 385 million dinars in 1996, representing two per cent of the gross domestic product (GDP).

Finance Minister Nouri Zorgati told the parliament that apart from foreign resources already secured, Tunisia will need to borrow a net 400 million dinars from the international financial markets in 1996.

He estimated that the treasury would also raise 1.175 billion dinars funds on the domestic market through treasury bills issues.

Mr. Zorgati said as result

of the lifting of a 10 per cent customs tax on imports of European countries-made equipment goods starting of Jan. 1, 1996, in compliance with a trade zone accord with the EU, customs duty incomes will fall by 2.3 per cent.

The loss will be compensated through a 10 per cent value added tax (VAT) on these goods, he said.

VAT rate on petrol, electricity and gas will rise to 17 per cent at a date to be fixed sometime in 1996, from an actual six per cent, he added.

A 10 per cent VAT rate will be imposed gradually for the first time on retail shop sales except for food, subsidised goods and medicines. Mr. Zorgati said.

The government forecasts a revenue of 33 million dinars from privatisation, against 41 million in 1995, he said.

Total public external and domestic debt will reach 10.548 billion dinars at the end of 1996, representing 55 per cent of GDP, budget documents said.

Japan panel unveils plan to clean up bad loan mess

TOKYO (R) — A key advisory panel to Japan's finance ministry Friday unveiled its final proposals for a framework outlining how authorities plan to clean up the nation's multi-billion dollar bad-loan mess.

The panel stressed the need for Japan to create a transparent banking policy to tackle the bad loan problem, which has weighed on the economy and raised fears of a financial crisis.

The ministry said last month that problem loans at Japanese financial institutions totalled about 38 trillion yen (\$372 billion) at the end of September, of which about 19 trillion yen (\$186 billion) was judged irrecoverable. Analysts say the actual amount is likely to be about twice the official figure.

"Japan should establish a transparent financial system based on market-oriented and self-responsibility principles, while tackling the bad loan problems which Japan faces," Ryuchihiro Tachi, head of a subcommittee of the advisory panel, told a news conference.

Financial analysts welcomed the contents of the panel's report, the product of six months of debate.

"The report is a very important policy statement, as it shows clearly that the finance ministry intends to move towards a market discipline system and to handle financial failures openly," said Yoshi-nobu Yamada, analyst at Merrill Lynch Japan.

The panel's proposal to reform the nation's deposit insurance system to deal with financial failures and its support for the creation of a Japanese version of the U.S. Resolution Trust Corp (RTC) were key points, Mr.

Yamada said.

The panel endorsed the finance ministry's plan to turn Tokyo Kyodo Bank — a special bank created to take over the operations of two failed Tokyo-based credit unions — into a Japanese version of the RTC.

It said the new body's role should be limited to handling failed credit unions, and in future, taxpayers' money should be used only to cover losses due to the failure of credit unions.

The panel also urged legislation to allow officials to initiate bankruptcy procedures for failed institutions and to remedy financial problems of banks at an early stage, based on such objective criteria as capital ratios.

The report was unveiled three days after the government approved a plan including the use of 685 billion yen (\$6.71 billion) of taxpayers' money to help wind up the nation's seven ailing mortgage firms, known as "jusen."

The plan has come under fire from the media, business leaders and opposition par-

ties, however, as ill-explained, hastily conceived and too easy on the agricultural cooperatives that were major lenders to the ailing mortgage firms.

The panel said the government's decision to use taxpayers' money to liquidate the mortgage firms was unavoidable. But it urged, as a prerequisite, clarification of the responsibility of the banks which founded the firms, agricultural financial bodies and other creditors.

The report comes at the end of a year in which Japanese banks' image and credit ratings have been battered by a string of financial failures and the Daiwa bond loss scandal.

In August, Japan had its first post-world war two bank collapse.

In September, Daiwa Bank announced that a New York bond trader ran up \$1.1 billion in losses on deals over a decade.

Last month U.S. authorities told Daiwa to shut its U.S. operations by Feb. 2 for allegedly concealing the losses.

German economy hit by dollar-induced weakness — OECD

PARIS (AFP) — The German economy is set to gradually regain momentum over the next two years after a poorer than expected 1995 showing caused by a sharp appreciation of the Deutsche mark and high wage settlements, the OECD has said.

Demand unexpectedly faltered in the final quarter, linked with large inventory build-ups, forcing the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) to make a last-minute downward revision of its growth projections for Germany.

In its year-end Economic Outlook, finalised at the end of November, the OECD said German GDP growth declined to an estimated 2.1 per cent from a strong 1994 rate of just under 3.0 per cent, but should now recover, more or less in line with the OECD average, at 2.4 per cent in 1996 and 2.7 per cent in 1997.

Presenting the outlook at a news conference, OECD chief economist Kumi Shigehara said that given the latest indicators made available since November, "we

now expect somewhat lower growth in Germany in late 1995 and early 1996 than shown."

Although precise figures had still to be worked out, he said he would "guess" output would be about 0.25 point lower for this year and next — or just over 1.8 and 2.1 per cent.

Mr. Shigehara also said the Bundesbank move a few days ago to further cut short-term interest rates should help boost growth later in 1996.

Business confidence was hit as the dollar plunged against the mark and the yen at the start of 1995 and cost pressures were strengthened in the first half by the wage round in most major sectors.

The OECD said a partial reversal of the earlier appreciation of the mark against the dollar and key European currencies, combined with continued industrial restructuring, had steadily improve export prospects.

It said industry optimism about the outlook in this respect had been confirmed by a steady inflow of export orders, and forecast strong export market growth

through 1997 that could raise export growth to some 6.5 to 6.9 per cent from a modest 3.8 per cent in 1995.

The OECD said expanding exports could lead to a quick recovery of industrial investment in plant and machinery, adding that high direct and indirect wage costs appeared to have induced industry to defend its competitive stance by investing more in rationalisation.

OECD projections forecast a 7.1 per cent increase in business investment next year, rising to 8.6 per cent in 1997, compared with this year's modest 4.0 per cent.

It said this year's rapid rise in wages "has not been reflected in increased inflationary pressures but rather in continuing labour force adjustment and higher labour productivity."

Despite steady jobs growth in the former East Germany, overall employment in Germany was slightly down this year and the jobless rate remained high at 9.3 per cent of the workforce, somewhat less than the 1994 level of 9.6 per cent.

The rate was expected to remain unchanged next year but could edge down to 9.1 per cent by 1997, the OECD said.

The poor labour market outlook could restrain private consumption, but monetary policy remains geared to achieving a steady growth of demand, and overall consumption could expand at an annual rate of some 2.5 per cent, so underpinning GDP growth.

The OECD noted that underlying inflation in Ger-

many was now probably "under 2.0 per cent" after a gradual declaration throughout the year, accentuated by the fall in import prices triggered by the mark's rise.

The report also said Germany was living up to its objective of long-run consolidation of public deficits with the scheduled federal deficit to be reduced to less than 1.0 per cent of GDP by 1999. The overall public sector deficit was probably cut to 3.0 per cent of GDP this year from 4.4 per cent in 1994, it said.

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JUMBLE

Unscramble these four Jumbles, one letter to each square, to form four ordinary words.

OSPOT
ASTEE
YAIMDS
FRIEY

Print answer here: _____

Saturday's Jumbles: HOUSE PROVE MODIFY INFIRM

Answer: Easy to break if you're not careful — A PROMISE

THAT SCRAMBLED WORD GAME

by Henri Arnold and Mike Argiron

Excellent
WHAT SHE THOUGHT OF THE PRINTER'S WORK.

Now arrange the circled letters to form the surprise answer, as suggested by the above cartoon.

(Answers tomorrow)

THE Daily Crossword by Stephen Floreck

ACROSS

- Coarse file
- Chair parts
- Disguise
- A Sharif
- Hidden booty
- Against
- Great —
- nous (between us)
- Part
- United Kingdom part
- Sir Peter
- Suites: abbr.
- Shock
- Dish
- Consume
- Assail
- Wing parts
- Sergeant or chef start
- "Yankee Doodle..."
- Certain committee
- Pie — mode
- Cloud
- Caused
- Impassive
- Sandy's bark
- At what location?
- Certain European
- NY Mets' venue
- Utter authoritatively
- Duties
- Aroma
- Ryan or Tatum
- Unique
- Gambling spot
- Sudden pass
- Paradise
- Willie of baseball
- Rigid bar
- Legal document

DOWN

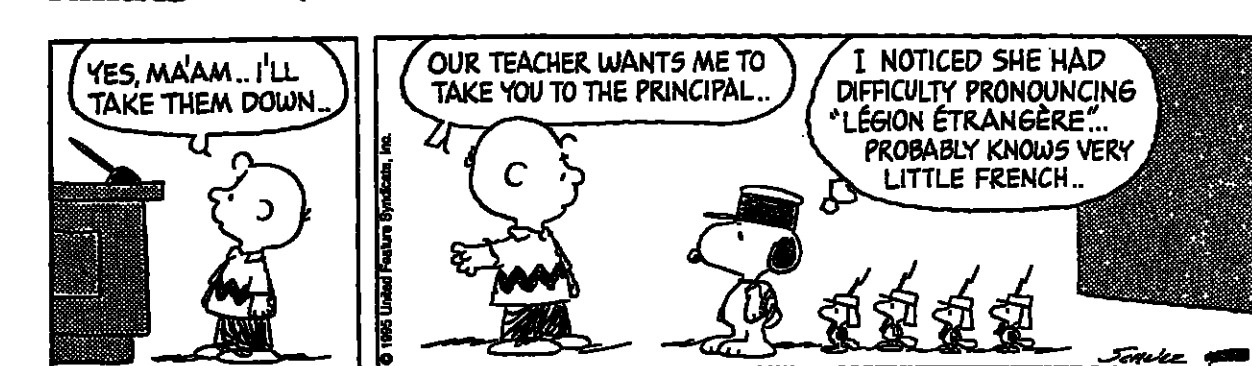
- Used a bus (unanimously)
- Warbled

Yesterday's puzzle solved:

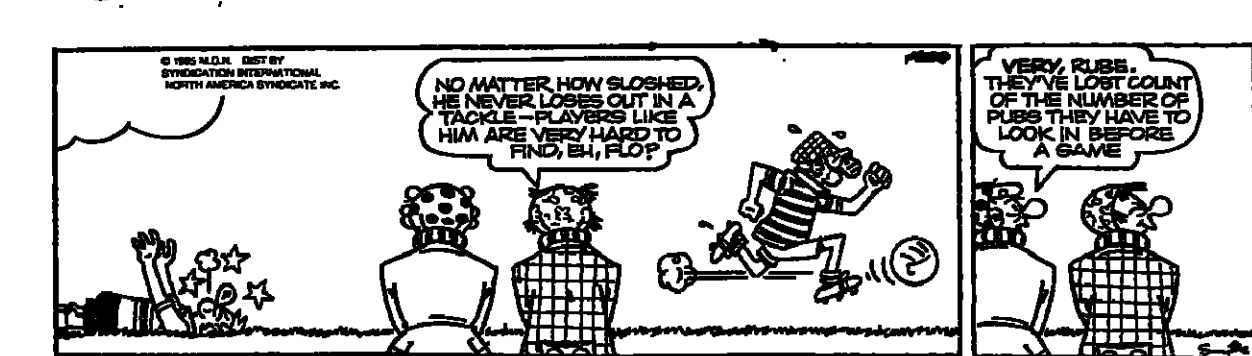
BRAD AGRIA ABATE
ROME ORAL NADIR
ATOM RIGA OVALS
CHRISTMAS RAMET
SCAM SARA
SPIER STOCKINGS
LINDA RNA ATRI
ANN MOLIERE ION
SNOW SIN DANAE
HAVETHEIR EVIENS
ANOVA ACME
SATAN OWHANGUP
LAVER ERAS ELON
TRESS RENT REND

37 Thous. cu. ft. for short
40 In the wings
43 Restaurants
44 CA sch.
46 Jug
47 Presided
48 Thoroughfare
49 Coral island
54 More healthy

Peanuts



Andy Capp



Mutt'n'Jeff



HOROSCOPE FORECAST FOR SUNDAY, DECEMBER 24, 1995

ARIES: (March 21 to April 19) Be poised in handling your affairs today so that others will not disturb you. Be practical and avoid one who is undependable.

TAURUS: (April 20 to May 20) You may find that an ally you had depended on for help will not be cooperative at all. Don't enter any disagreement between fellow associates.

GEMINI: (May 21 to June 21) Difficulties are apt to crop up where handling duties are concerned, but take them in your stride and you can handle any situation.

MOON CHILDREN: (June 22 to July 21) The good time you had anticipated may not materialise today, so be willing to change your plans and go with the flow.

LEO: (July 22 to August 21) Your loved ones represent security for you so don't plan any changes for the time being, but go along with conditions as they are.

VIRGO: (August 22 to September 22) You could make mistakes while driving on the highway like everybody else today, so be particularly careful at this time.

LIBRA: (September 23 to October 22) Before you pay some bill, be sure it is correct and avoid difficulties arising. Choose practical activities today over pleasure.

SCORPIO: (October 23 to November 21) Don't try to get your own way exclusively in some situation today, but be cooperative for good results in the activities you are currently engaged in.

SAGITTARIUS: (November 22 to December 21) You want to run away from some problematical affair, but it is best you handle it tactfully or there could be complications.

CAPRICORN: (December 22 to January 20) Do not be forceful in trying to gain a personal aim or you could get into trouble. Be patient and tactful at this time so can be successful.

AQUARIUS: (January 21 to February 19) You have outside duties to handle today, but be sure you are diplomatic with others. Spend the evening at home with close friends and loved ones.

PISCES: (February 20 to March 20) Study new ideas well before you attempt to put them in operation, or you could get into trouble with those in authority who have your future in their hands.

Birthstone of December: Turquoise — Zircon

Europeans to build \$1b Israel-Egypt refinery

TEL AVIV (R) — A consortium of European companies won a contract to build the first privately owned refinery in Egypt, a \$1 billion joint venture between Israel and Egypt, the project's Israeli coordinator has said.

The Middle East Oil Refineries, MIDOR, is the largest joint venture undertaken between Israel and the Arab World.

Technipetrol of Italy and Technip of France will be lead contractors for the construction of a 100,000 barrel per day oil refinery in Ilexandra.

Technicas Reunidas of Spain will be a major subcontractor, said Merhav, the Israeli partner in the joint venture.

Yosef Maiman of Merhav

and Egyptian businessman Hussein Salem signed a letter of intent in Cairo last Monday, marking the end of a competition by several leading corporations.

Final documents were also signed for a European Investment Bank credit of 220 million ECUs (\$300 million).

The Israeli government through its export credit agency will extend a credit of more than \$100 million. The export credit agencies of Italy, Belgium and Spain will extend similar credits, Merhav said.

British, German, French and Japanese export credit agencies have indicated interest in extending financing as well.

Merhav said it expects the

project development phase to conclude by the end of the first quarter of 1996 and construction to begin shortly after. The refinery is to come on stream in late 1999.

Nimrod Novik, projects coordinator at Merhav, said the refinery was "the number one peace project."

Merhav and Mr. Salem each have 40 per cent of the project. The Egyptian General Petroleum Corp. has the remaining 20 per cent.

The refinery will produce mostly unleaded, "environmentally friendly" gasoline. Israel and Egypt will each get a third of production while the rest will be sold to adjacent markets such as Turkey, southern Italy, Greece, Cyprus and the Palestinians.

Algeria, B.P. sign a \$3.5b gas deal

PARIS (R) — Algeria's state-owned gas and oil firm Sonatrach and British Petroleum Co. PLC (B.P.) signed Saturday a \$3.5 billion deal to develop huge gas reservoirs in southern Algeria, a B.P. statement said.

The contract, which took two years to negotiate, was signed in Hassi Messaoud, where Algeria's main oilfields are located.

The deal is to explore for, produce gas in the in Salah southeastern region, and jointly market it in Europe.

The full cost is estimated at some \$3.5 billion over a five-year period, 65 per cent of which will be funded by B.P., the British company said in its statement faxed to Reuters.

Sonatrach, quoted by the official Algerian news agency APs, put the contract at "about" \$3 billion in a statement announcing the signing of the deal.

Energy sources in London said this week B.P. expects to take about one-third of net

profits over the 20-30 year life of the project.

Algeria says it is the most important contract ever signed with a foreign company.

"This is a landmark agreement which would increase B.P.'s worldwide gas production by 30 per cent," B.P. chief executive John Brown said at the signing ceremony.

"It has the potential to open up a new area of gas production in Algeria and, from the next decade onwards, to give European consumers greater choice in their sources of gas supply," he said.

Estimates of proven reserves in the seven in Salah reservoirs are put at 200 billion cubic metres, with production expected to run at nine billion cubic metres a year, Sonatrach said earlier.

Sonatrach says the upstream licence covers 23,000 square kilometres of the Algerian desert in the remote in Salah region, some 1,200

kilometres south of Algiers, which has the seven gas fields already known.

The accord includes a preliminary two-and-a-half-year phase aimed at appraising reserves and searches and a second four-year phase for the drilling of nearly 200 wells and a pipeline system of several hundred kilometres, Sonatrach said.

Algeria, ranked eighth among world gas producers, already holds reserves of 128 trillion cubic feet and exported 30 billion cubic metres. It aims at doubling its exports by the year 2000.

The B.P.-Sonatrach deal takes added significance because of the conflict between Muslim fundamentalist guerrillas and the army-backed government in which 50,000 people have been killed in nearly four years.

Direct foreign investment in Algeria has been suspended except in the energy sector pending improvement of the security situation.

New Syrian sugar plant to process 200,000 tonnes

DAMASCUS (R) — Owners of what will be Syria's first private sugar plant have decided to double planned capacity to 200,000 tonnes per year.

Feras Tias told Reuters he and the main shareholders had decided to seek the capacity increase to meet an expected rise in demand.

In March Mr. Tias was given government approval for his plans to enter the industry, previously limited to the state, with a plant capable of producing 100,000 tonnes a year.

He said construction of the \$33 million plant would start early next year and it would begin production in the second quarter of 1997.

Mr. Tias heads the Mas Industrial and Business Group, which is currently the largest single private sugar trader in Syria.

"We believe that demand would increase during the next few years and production of the existing sugar plants would not meet that demand," he said.

Mr. Tias said that his group had already received offers for the construction of the new factory — to be located at the port of Tartus — from major French, Italian and German companies.

"We are now studying

these offers and we hope to make a decision in January," Mr. Tias said.

Mr. Tias said he and other major shareholders from the Tias family and other businessmen would own 50 per cent of the shares and the rest would be sold to the public at 500 Syrian pounds (\$10) per share.

The International Sugar Organisation puts Syria's annual per capita sugar consumption at 34.3 kilograms, compared with an average world level of 20 kilograms.

Officials and traders told

Reuters last month Syria's government and private sugar trading companies were planning to increase 1996 sugar imports to 455,000 tonnes from an expected level of 418,000 this year.

Sugar imports by Mr. Tias himself in 1996 would go up to 75,000 tonnes from around 60,000 in 1995.

The government owns and runs Syria's six existing sugar factories, which produce around 100,000 tonnes of white sugar from locally produced beet and around 100,000 tonnes of whites from imported raw sugar.

Gulf at bottom of list of EU priorities

ABU DHABI (AFP) — The European Union (EU) has put Gulf Arab states at the bottom of its list of priorities, giving preference to links with eastern Europe and other countries, a senior Gulf official said.

Although the six Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states are a major market for the EU, Europe is still reluctant to sign a free trade agreement with them, GCC Secretary General Sheikh Fahim Al Qassimi said.

"We should realise that the EU is currently concerned in

eastern Europe, North Africa and some Mediterranean states by trying to merge them into the group," he told (UAE) weekly magazine Al Shurq.

The EU and GCC states have been locked in negotiations for more than eight years for a free trade pact which could give Gulf exports of petrochemicals and other non-oil products greater access to the European market.

But the negotiations have bogged down over fears of flooding the EU market with cheap Gulf products

BUSINESS

A review of news from the Arabic press

Firings trigger labour dispute

★ A LABOUR dispute between the management and the workers at the National Multi Engineering Industries Company has escalated but an attempt to reconcile both sides will be starting this week by the Ministry of Labour. The workers, through the Trade Union for Electrical workers, are demanding the return of all the employees who were fired and threatening work stoppage on Jan. 2, 1996 if their demand is not met. The head of the union described the work stoppage as a mean to highlight the management's oppression, the suffering of the workers and the illegal administrative measures against them. The chairman of the company accused the union of seizing the opportunity to use threatening and instigating measures against the firm which, he said, has cost more than JD 50 million to set it up. The chairman said the company had exercised its rights in firing workers or warning them for violations of administrative instructions, misconduct or illegal acts (Al Dustour).

ACC extends JD2m loan

★ THE AGRICULTURAL Credit Corporation has approved extending JD2 million loan to the National Food (Shafa) Processing Company to enable it honour its obligations to farmers. The loan, to expire mid 1996, will settle payments due to farmers for their tomato supplies and will help the company market its processed products at the appropriate time and price (Al Dustour).

Fariz likely to succeed Nabulsi

★ INFORMED SOURCES said that Ziyad Fariz, former minister of planning, is strongly favoured to head the Central Bank after the post of governor becomes vacant with the resignation of Mohammad Said Nabulsi. Dr. Nabulsi is strongly tipped to be the board chairman of the Jordan Export Development and Finance Bank where Dr. Fariz currently serves as general manager (Al Dustour).

Central Bank extends deadline for some banks to raise capital

★ THE CENTRAL bank has extended the period for some banks to raise their minimum capital to JD 20 million until the end of 1997 instead of December 1996. Only those which have a total equity of JD 15 million will have until 1997 to raise their capital while those having an equity less than JD 15 million have to meet the 1996 deadline. The Central Bank governor told a bankers' meeting that commercial and investment banks can start implementing the concept of a comprehensive bank under certain conditions. As such, commercial banks would be able to enter the stock market operations and arrange bond issues while investment banks would be able to extend short-term commercial loans, open current accounts and other stock market transactions. This step is expected to positively reflect on various economic sectors especially the Amman Financial Market (Al Ra'i).

Winston cigarettes' price lowered

★ AS A result of the cooperation between the Ministry of Supply and the Jordan Tobacco and Cigarettes Company and due to the reduction in some costs, the price of a packet of Winston-cigarette produced locally was lowered from 800 fils to 700 fils. The ministry also reduced the price of split leaflets by 10 per cent so that a kilogramme would now sell for 450 fils instead of 500 fils. The price of whole leaflets remains unchanged at 400 fils per kilogramme (Al Dustour).

Financial Markets

Currency	New York Jan 21 1995	New York Jan 22 1995
Sterling Pound	1.4812	1.4810
Deutsche Mark	1.4387	1.4376
Swiss Franc	1.1570	1.1573
French Franc	4.9310	4.9195
Japanese Yen	101.78	101.30
European Currency Unit	1.2760**	1.2770

Currency	1 MTH	3 MTHS	6 MTHS	12 MTHS
U.S. Dollar	5.33	5.37	5.18	5.11
Sterling Pound	6.25	6.25	6.12	6.06
Deutsche Mark	3.75	3.56	3.43	3.37
Swiss Franc	1.87	1.88	1.81	1.56
French Franc	5.05	5.15	5.12	5.12
Japanese Yen	0.22	0.25	0.25	0.25
European Currency Unit	5.19	5.00	5.05	5.00

Metal	USD/Oz	JD/Gm	Metal	USD/Oz	JD/Gm
Gold	385.60	7.70	Silver	5.17	0.100

Central Bank of Jordan Exchange Rate Bulletin

Currency	Bid	Offer
U.S. Dollar	0.7265	0.7160
Sterling Pound	1.0913	1.0958
Deutsche Mark	0.2919	0.2924
Swiss Franc	0.2121	0.2132
French Franc	0.1458	0.1465
Japanese Yen	0.0091	0.0094
Dutch Guilder	0.2525	0.2517
Swedish Krona	0.0000	0.0000
Italian Lira	0.0000	0.0000
Belgian Franc	0.0000	0.0000

Currency	Bid	Offer
Bahraini Dinar	1.8620	1.8750
Lebanese Lira	0.005815	0.005850
Saudi Riyal	0.1670	0.1678
Kuwaiti Dinar	0.3070	0.3070
Qatari Riyal	0.1935	0.1935
Egyptian Pound	0.2100	0.2100
Omani Rial	1.8520	1.8510
UAE Dirham	0.2920	0.2933
Greek Drachma	0.0000	0.0000
Cypriot Pound	1.5125	1.5840

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15 years after boycott, Carter seeks full attendance at '96 Olympics

ATLANTA (AP) — Fifteen years ago, he was reviled by many for keeping U.S. athletes away from the Summer Olympics in Moscow. With the 1996 Games in his home state, former president Jimmy Carter now is trying to make sure no country stays home.

"Almost all of history has endless ironies, and this is an Olympic irony," said John Lucas, an Olympic historian at Penn State who was a vigorous critic of the 1980 Carter-led boycott.

Practising the kind of unofficial diplomacy he has used to mediate disputes in various global hot spots, Carter is urging North Korea to send a team to the Olympics in Atlanta. North Korea is the only one of 197 nations that has not accepted an invitation to the Games.

This week, Carter said that North Korean leaders had told him they were rethinking whether to come to the Games. Carter led a peace mission to North Korea in 1994. If he can persuade North Korea to attend the Games, Carter ultimately may be remembered more for helping arrange a historic gathering than for the boycott, Lucas said.

"Something absolutely extraordinary will have taken place," Lucas said.

Carter's correspondence with North Korea is happening independently of the International Olympic Committee, which issues Olympic invitations, and the Atlanta Committee for the Olympic Games.

ACOG did not know of Carter's intentions to contact North Korea, spokesman Bill Marx said.

"He has no official role with the Olympics," Carter spokeswoman Carrie Harmon said.

Yet the IOC, which has angered and insulted by the Carter boycott, applauds his current effort.

"Anything which can contribute to bring all nations to the Games has to be encouraged," IOC director general Francois Carrard said Wednesday. "If anybody can deliver, we would only be pleased."

Carter launched the boycott — and proposed an alternate games for boycotting countries — to protest the Soviet

invasion of Afghanistan.

"He was the one who prevented 600 young American men and women from going to Moscow because of his own personal ideological standards," Lucas said. "It was counterproductive."

In recent years, relations between Carter and the Olympics apparently have thawed.

Anita de Frantz, an IOC member from Los Angeles who missed a probable medal in rowing because of the Moscow boycott, said she doesn't detect much lingering resentment toward Carter.

"Even closer to the time, it was more a sort of sadness for him to be so uninformed about the Games — this man just doesn't know what the Olympic Games are about," she said. "He seems to be more interested in sports than he used to be."

Billy Payne, the president of ACOG, arranged a fence-mending meeting in 1993 between Carter and IOC President Juan Antonio Samaranch in Atlanta, after which Samaranch said the issue was over.

And Carter has close ties to some top officials at ACOG: A.D. Frazier, the committee's No. 2 executive, organized Carter's 1977 inauguration, and Andrew Young, ACOG's co-chairman, was United Nations ambassador in the Carter administration.

As one of Georgia's most prominent citizens, Carter will attend the Games and will be very much in public view next summer, Payne said.

"There is no way our president Carter is going to be anything other than a very important part of our hometown team," Payne said.

With 196 countries confirming plans to attend the 1996 Games, Atlanta will set a record for participation regardless of North Korea's decision. But organizers had hoped for a 100 per cent turnout.

North Korea stayed home from the 1984 and 1988 Games, but did send a team to the 1992 Games in Barcelona.

SPORTS IN BRIEF

Two years for crazed Becker fan

MUNICH (AFP) — A crazed admirer of German tennis star Boris Becker received a two-year suspended jail sentence here Friday for besieging the player's entourage with threatening phone calls. The 29-year-old man phoned the office of Becker's manager Axel Meyer-Wolden 11 times between March last year and February threatening to kill the player and his family unless the national lottery draw was manipulated for him to win a fortune. Psychiatric experts said the man was not responsible for his actions when he made the calls. He further threatened to plant a bomb at the Germany-Croatia Davis Cup tie in Karlsruhe as well commit a "massacre" at the Key Biscayne tournament in the United States if his demand was not met. The hoaxer, who presented himself as an ardent fan of Becker, said he wanted money to get married, have a family, pay off his debts and buy a house as well as a new car every two years. In a statement read out in court, Becker and his wife Barbara said they had taken the threats seriously and were particularly worried for their baby son Noah Gabriel.

'St. Louis cardinals sale close'

ST. LOUIS (R) — A group of businessmen is close to buying the St. Louis Cardinals from Anheuser-Busch Cos Inc. Bud N. local media reports said Friday. Broadcast reports and the St. Louis Post-Dispatch said the principals were Andrew Baur, chairman of Southwest Bank of St. Louis, Stephen Brauer, president of Hunter Engineering Co. of St. Louis and William Dewitt Jr. of Cincinnati, a

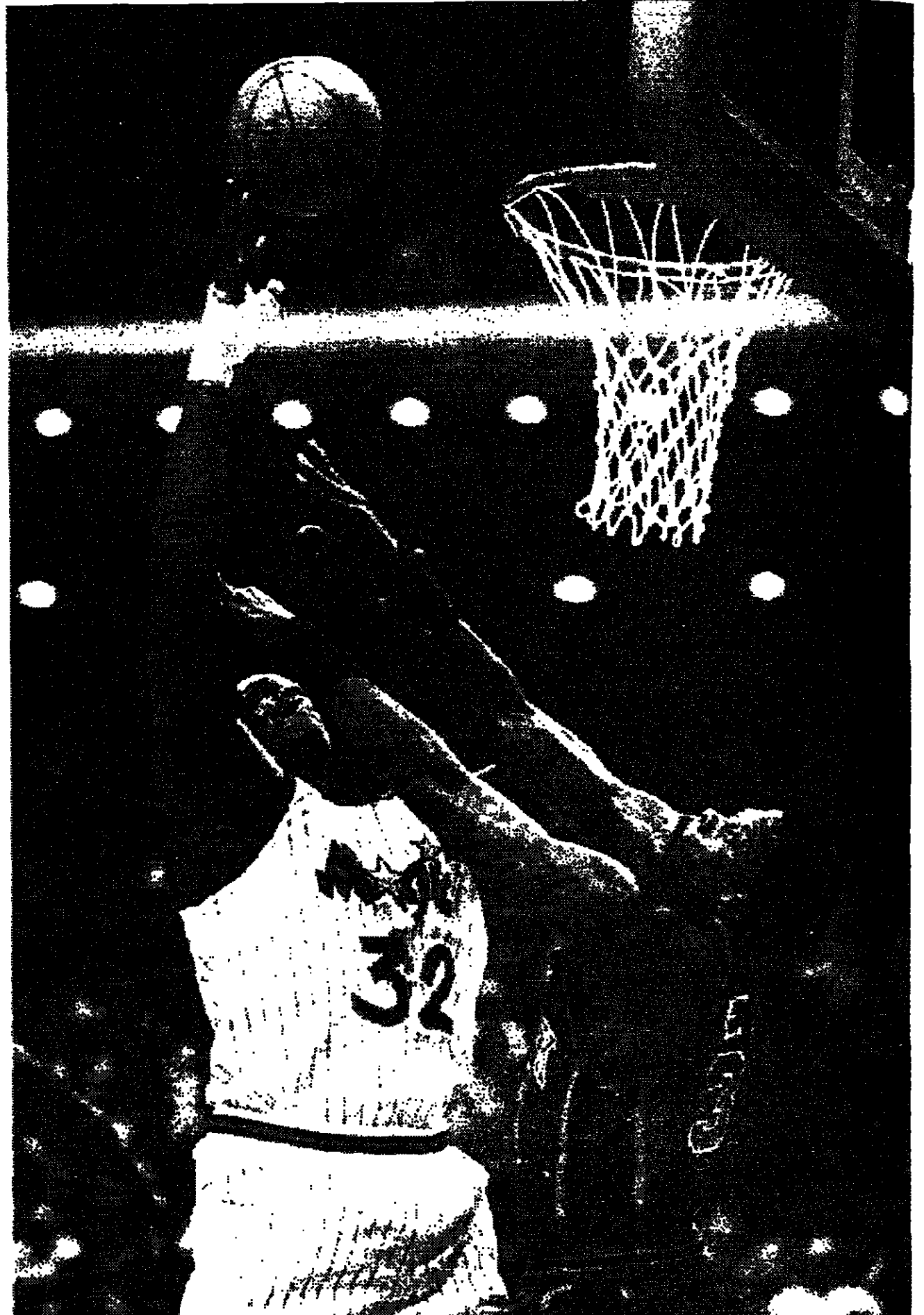
part-owner of the Texas Rangers whose father once owned the old St. Louis Browns and the Cincinnati Reds.

Shearer could face F. A. rap

LONDON (R) — England and Blackburn striker Alan Shearer could face a Football Association disrepute charge after being reported to police for gestures made to Middlesbrough fans during Blackburn's 1-0 home victory last week. Shearer is alleged to have taunted the 'boro contingent after netting a first-half winner, his 23rd goal of the season. And police have confirmed they have examined complaints from supporters at the game and will be compiling a report to be forwarded to the F.A., even though referee Paul Danson took no action against the player.

Overmars out of Euro finals

THE HAGUE (AFP) — Holland and Ajax winger Marc Overmars will miss next summer's European Championship finals with a knee injury, his club revealed Friday. An exploratory operation showed that 22-year-old Overmars — a transfer target for Manchester United — has torn ligaments in his left knee and will be sidelined for the rest of the season. Overmars' injury, picked up in Wednesday's league win over De Graafschap Doetinchem, proved worse than at first feared and is a huge blow to the European Cup holders, through to the last eight of this season's competition. His absence will also hit the Dutch national side when they take on England, Scotland and Switzerland in next summer's Euro '96 first round matches.



Orlando Magic centre Shaquille O'Neal (32) tries to go over New York Knicks centre Patrick Ewing (33) during first half action in the Orlando Arena (Reuters photo)

O'Neal leads Magic over Knicks

ORLANDO (R) — Shaquille O'Neal and Dennis Scott combined to score 24 points in the first quarter as the

Orlando Magic stormed to an early 19-point lead Friday on the way to a 111-90 rout of their division rival New York Knicks.

Zan Tabak scored a season-high 24 points for Toronto.

In Boston, Dino Radja hit a free throw with 2.4 seconds remaining as the Boston Celtics rallied to defeat the Minnesota Timberwolves 114-113 in a record-setting game.

Todd Day scored a career-high 41 points, including 24 in the second quarter to tie Larry Bird's team mark. Day hit five three-pointers and was 9-of-13 from the field in the quarter.

Dana Barros sank a three-pointer in the first quarter, his 80th straight game connecting from long range, breaking Michael Adams' NBA standard.

Radja had 19 points and eight rebounds for Boston, while Christian Laettner led the T-Wolves with 23 points.

In Atlanta, Grant Long scored 23 points, including a pair of free throws with eight seconds left, as the Atlanta Hawks beat the New Jersey Nets 94-91.

After Long's free throws and Steve Kerr and Toni Kukoc scored 16 points apiece for NBA-best Chicago (22-2), who remained unbeaten in 12 home games this season.

Armon Gilliam led the Nets, losers of five straight, with 23 points.

At Indiana, Mark Jackson scored 20 points and Derrick McKey and Reggie Miller each added 16 as the Indiana Pacers defeated the struggling Dallas Mavericks 90-79.

In Miami, Grant Hill scored 24 points and Allan Houston added 22 as the Detroit Pistons posted their third straight win with an 84-75 victory over the bobbled Miami Heat.

Kurt Thomas finished with 21 points and Bimbo Coles added 19 for the Heat, who have lost eight of their last 10 and were missing three of the starters due to injury.

In Philadelphia, Glenn Robinson hit a three-pointer with 1:02 to play to give Milwaukee the lead for good as the Bucks rallied past the Philadelphia 76ers 99-94.

In Vancouver, the Phoenix Suns used a 25-6 burst in the second quarter to pull away from the Grizzlies on their way to a 101-80 romp.

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RESULTS

Indiana	90	Dallas	79
Atlanta	94	New Jersey	91
Boston	114	Minnesota	113
Detroit	84	Miami	75
Milwaukee	99	Philadelphia	94
Orlando	111	New York	90
Chicago	113	Toronto	104
Phoenix	101	Vancouver	104
Golden State	132	Washington	117
L A Lakers	116	Sacramento	83



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Premier League roundup

Wihdat, Kufroum improve; Ahli again disappoint fans

By a Jordan Times Staff Reporter

AMMAN — While Al Ramtha and Al Faisali remained in top two places, the standings of other teams struggling to catch up and take the lead changed significantly after titleholders Al Wihdat's 1-0 win over leaders Al Ramtha. Al Ramtha's lead was cut to two points as Al Faisali caught up after their 3-1 win over Al Qadissieh. Al Qadissieh were the biggest dropers, down three places to 6th, after their defeat to the former champions. Meanwhile, Al Hussein went up one place after their crushing 5-0 win over bottom-of-the-table Russeifa. Despite remaining in the same position, Al Jazireh was another team who scored a big win, 5-2 over Al Jalil. Kufroum also went up one place after holding Al Ahli to a 1-1 draw. Al Ahli thus remained in 9th place and are now among the last four. Al Baqaa who have moved out of the relegation zone scored a crucial 2-0 victory over Sahab that is sure to strengthen their chances if they keep up their improving form.

STANDINGS AFTER 14TH WEEK

	P	W	D	L	GF	GA	Pts
Wihdat	14	9	3	2	19	5	30
Faisali	14	8	4	2	23	9	28
Ramtha	14	7	5	2	30	18	26
Wihdat	14	7	5	2	22	13	26
Kufroum	14	6	6	2	19	11	24
Qadissieh	14	7	3	4	19	15	24
Jazireh	14	5	4	5	25	22	19
Hussein	14	5	3	6	22	21	18
Alhi	14	3	7	4	17	13	16
Sahab	14	1	8	5	5	18	11
Jalil	14	1	2	11	13	34	5
Russeifa	14	-	-	14	18	56	-

Turkish delight for English players, or not?

ISTANBUL (AP) — When English soccer players joined the Turkish League this season, they were welcomed with great fanfare. The celebration didn't last long. Hounded by the media and criticised by fans, Mike Marsh and Barry Venison returned home after a few months, unable to fit into the Turkish lifestyle or prove themselves on the field. Istanbul club Galatasaray, known for its forges in European competitions in recent years, hired former Liverpool and Glasgow Rangers manager Graeme Souness during the summer with the hope that he would bring them the Turkish championship. Souness recruited Marsh, Venison and Welsh international Dean Saunders, all who played under him in his Liverpool days. The players cost the club some \$8 million. The players were treated to a tumultuous welcome by Galatasaray's fanatic supporters at the season's opening ceremony. But the euphoria was over soon. When the players failed to deliver, the press and fans got nasty. "Marsh had to go back. He had difficulties settling into the way of life here," Souness told the Associated Press. "Venison got himself involved in a few things he shouldn't have," he said, in an apparent referral to a scuffle involving the player in Istanbul. The press also were unforgiving in their reports on the English players. "The press really do hammer people, at all costs," said Brad Friedel, Galatasaray's American goalkeeper. Friedel, 24, from Cleveland, Ohio, joined Galatasaray in September in place of Marsh. He, too, has failed to escape criticism. He, however, was also critical of the Turkish media, saying they quoted him as saying things he had never said. Settling into life and football in Turkey proved to be tough for the British players. "It was a struggle at the start. It is a different style of football, the supporters are different and so are the press," said Saunders. Recent press reports said that Galatasaray was planning to sell Saunders, who has managed only seven goals in the first half of the season and has been absent for four weeks with a knee injury. Although this year's transfers were not the first from Britain, they were the most to be recorded in one season. Only four other English players have ever played in Turkey. Some 40 foreign players currently play in the Turkish first division, mainly from Europe and Africa.

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Hakkinen cannot wait for next season

MONACO (R) — Finnish driver Mika Hakkinen, recovering in his Monaco home from a horrific crash in Adelaide six weeks ago which almost cost him his life, said he could not wait to start racing again next season.

Hakkinen, who fractured the base of his skull in a 270-kph crash in qualifying for the Australian Grand Prix on November 10, said in an interview made available to Reuters: "The spark is back within me in a big way."

"Now I'm thinking only about racing, about getting back to this sport I love so much."

"Believe me, no-one is going to enjoy this Christmas more than I will. As for the new year, I can't wait for it. I feel great."

Hakkinen said he was already driving his own Mercedes in Monaco and had been told by Formula One doctor Sid Watkins he could drive his McLaren team car from the end of January.

"But at the moment, I'm not aiming for anything beyond getting back to my old physical conditions," he said.

Hakkinen said he had lost 10 kg in weight during his

hospital stay after the accident but that he was now eating well, taking long walks and using an exercise bike to get fit.

"Overall, the feeling of recovery I have is just unbelievable now," he said. "I have to tell myself to slow down. I feel I would like to go running again but instead I have to say no, watch television, drink apple juice, take it easy."

The Finn said he recalled most details of his crash. "I remember going flat out down the straight, changing down to fifth gear for the corner, turning into it and feeling there was a problem at the back end of the car. I knew it was a puncture."

"I tried to keep the car on the track but at that speed it was impossible and I started spinning."

"I have no memory of actually hitting the wall but I remember sitting there in the car immediately afterwards and not being able to see anything."

"I was feeling pain and I couldn't move but I understood what was going on and remember telling myself to relax, just to let the medical people do their job."

"Certainly, I understood I was hurt quite badly and it was getting difficult to breathe. Then I felt this massive pain in my throat which I guess was when they put the tube in (for a tracheotomy) and at that point I lost consciousness."

Hakkinen said he woke up in hospital to be told by Watkins he had been lucky to escape brain surgery.

"Later I found out that my helmet had hit the steering wheel and it was this which caused my injury," he said. "When I sit in my McLaren with the seat belts on there is no way I can get near the steering wheel with my helmet so it just shows how big an impact I had with the wall."

Hakkinen said he had received great support from his family, his girlfriend Erja and McLaren team boss Ron Dennis and his wife Lisa.

"I'm also grateful to all the fans who have sent loads of faxes and cards and flowers from around the world," he added.

"Believe me, this has been a very important part of my recovery. It really opened my eyes and gave me a lot of strength."

Tomba collects 46th World Cup win

KRANJSKA GORA, Slovenia (R) — Italy's Alberto Tomba stormed back from a one-race boycott to collect his second Alpine skiing World Cup slalom win in four days on Friday.

The win was the 46th of Tomba's spectacular but often turbulent career, moving him past Luxembourg's Marc Girardelli into second place on the all-time victory list behind Sweden's Ingemar Stenmark who won 86 times in the 1970s and 1980s.

Tomba, who celebrated his 29th birthday with his first victory of the season on home snow in Madonna Di Campiglio on Tuesday, was heading home to Bologna after the win to celebrate Christmas.

Local favourite Jure Kosir, whose home is only 10 kms from Kranjska Gora, finished second, 1.21 seconds slower than Tomba's time of 1:36.84. Frenchman Sebastien Amiez was third in 1:38.43.

Tomba had talked of boycotting Friday's slalom after pulling out of the giant slalom on the same Podkoren course on Thursday.

'Major League, Japan' champs showdown in '97

TOKYO (R) — The first "real" World Series, between the champions of U.S. Major League Baseball and the Japanese League, could take place as early as the autumn of 1997, a Japanese sports daily reported on Saturday.

"The Japanese baseball commissioner's office admitted the possibility of staging a real World Series in 1997 at the earliest," the Chunichi sports daily newspaper said.

"The office was unavailable to confirm the report to Reuters, however."

A senior official at the office said the schedule was partly based on expectations the U.S. major leagues will have to come up with a new product such as a real World Series after signing \$1.7 billion in new five-year deals with the NBC and Fox Television Networks from next season, the daily said.

The acting commissioner of the U.S. major leagues, Bud Selig, had said on Thursday such a series might be on the horizon, but gave no other details.

"We are always looking to extend our relations with international baseball," Selig told WMVP radio in the United States. "We feel there is a possibility of a World Series between the Japanese champion and the American champion somewhere in the future."

The radio station reported that the major leagues sent club owners Peter McGowan of the San Francisco Giants

and Drayton McLaren of the Houston Astros to Japan last month to discuss the possibility of a Japan-U.S. World Series.

A top official of the U.S. major leagues' players' association is expected to visit Japan next month.

Japan's baseball commissioner Ichiro Yoshikuni welcomed Selig's remarks on Friday.

"I'm glad the Major League now highly rates the standard of Japanese baseball after (picture) Hideo Nomo showed his brilliance in the major leagues this year," he said.

The 26-year-old Nomo joined the Los Angeles Dodgers this year after quitting Japanese baseball club Kintetsu Buffaloes.

He won the National League's rookie of the year award after registering a 13-5 win-loss record and leading the league with 236 strikeouts.

The Balkans are back in international soccer

PARIS (AFP) — The return to the international fold of countries of the former Yugoslavia was surely a bigger victory than any on-pitch success in 1995.

Yugoslavia, beaten by Diego Maradona's Argentina on penalties in the 1990 World Cup quarter-finals in Italy, make their international comeback but without the Croatians and Bosnians who helped make them a force in world football.

"It's great for Yugoslav football after the sanctions," said Yugoslav football federation president Miljan Miljanic.

In December, they were drawn in the same World Cup qualifying group as Spain, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Malta and the Faroe Islands.

Uruguay may have won the 1995 Copa America, Norway earned the women's World Cup, and the 16 nations for the European Championships finals in England next year, were decided.

But the comeback of the Slavs, now comprising the rump state of Serbia and Montenegro, was the most heartwarming story.

Yugoslavia had been in international limbo since the United Nations' Security Council decreed a political and financial exclusion which encompassed a suspension of sporting contacts too — Yugoslavia's last match was a 2-0 defeat in Holland on March 25, 1992.

But the end of the civil war has meant Yugoslavia, often described as the European Brazil with its non-stop production of flair footballers, are back in the spotlight.

Bosnia-Herzegovina, admitted only after the Dayton peace accord brought almost four years of war to an end, will be relieved to have avoided the Serbs of Yugoslavia in their World Cup qualifying group, but cannot be too happy at having to play Croatia.

"It's a hard group but we're pleased just to be playing again," said Bosnian international Faruk Hadzibegovic who had a long career with French club Sochaux.

"We don't mind playing against Croatia," he added, following the draw in Paris.

Bosnia's group is a battle of the Balkans as they face neighbouring states Croatia and Slovenia, as well as European champions Denmark and Greece. Bosnia will play their home matches in Bologna, Italy.

Meanwhile, another off-pitch football battle was hardly resolved, but put on ice.

The clash of world governing body FIFA with its European counterpart UEFA over plans to decentralise football's power base in Paris in December was shelved.

FIFA spokesman Keith Cooper said a detailed report on proposals on UEFA's new world vision would be sent to FIFA's executive committee early next year.

UEFA president Lennart Johansson has lobbied support from the six confederations throughout the football world to rotate the hosting of the World Cup and the FIFA presidency between a new system of four continental bodies.

Oceania and Asia would merge, as would South America with its sister confederation of North and Central America and the Caribbean, reducing the number from six to four.

bodies. Each confederation would adopt the FIFA presidency for a four-year term after it had staged the World Cup.

But FIFA president Joao Havelange, in a letter to Johansson, who has publicly stated he wishes one day to succeed the Brazilian, said his plans "demoted FIFA to a simple co-ordinating body."

Meanwhile, the 17 nations for next year's European Championship finals, with an expected turnover of \$50 million, were known after the qualifiers ended in November.

The major upsets were the non-qualification of Sweden, third in the 1994 World Cup, Belgium/World Cup semi-finalists in 1986 and European Championship runners-up in 1980, and Eire, who qualified for the second round of the 1994 World Cup.

Sweden's demise was aided by injuries to key midfielder Tomas Brodin, out for most of the first half of the year, and goalkeeper Thomas Ravelli. Belgium's poor showing was probably down to the end of a golden era of such players as Jan Ceulemans and Eric Gerets.

Eire, meanwhile, only just failed to qualify after being beaten 2-0 by Holland in a play-off at Anfield, Liverpool. Patrick Kluivert scored both goals to end a superb year for him. He also scored the winner in the 1-0 victory over AC Milan in the European Champions Cup final.

SOCCER REVIEW

However Turkey, Croatia and the Czech Republic were new countries taking centre stage.

Croatia have well and truly exploded onto the scene with Devor Suker the top scorer of the qualifiers with 12 goals, a victory in Italy to boot, and they topped their qualifying group.

Turkey, with renowned striker Hakan Sukur, have made their first major international finals appearance since playing in the 1954 World Cup finals in Switzerland.

The Czech Republic also made their first ever finals following their split with Slovakia, perhaps the least painful of the post-cold-war redrawing of Europe's eastern boundaries.

Other highlights in 1995 were Uruguay's 14th South American Championship victory — a 5-3 penalty-shootout win over world champions Brazil following a 1-1 draw in the final in Montevideo.

Enzo Francescoli and Daniel Fonseca were Uruguay's main architects of victory.

But Brazil's new strikers Edmundo and Jatinho heralded the end of the Bebeto/Romario era and showed enough skill and flair to warn they could be a major force in the 1998 World Cup in France.

And Norway won the second women's World Cup with a 2-0 victory over Germany in Solna, Sweden. The success of the event even led FIFA general secretary Sepp Blatter to proclaim: "The future of football will be feminine."

GOREN BRIDGE
WITH OMAR SHARIF & TAMARA HIRSH
WEEKLY BRIDGE QUIZ

Q. 1 - Both vulnerable, as South you hold:
AK98 QJ745 Q82 AAQJ9

The bidding has proceeded:
NORTH EAST SOUTH WEST
1A Pass 7
What do you bid now?

Q. 2 - Both vulnerable, as South you hold:
AAK QJ32 QAKJ884 A95

The bidding has proceeded:
SOUTH WEST NORTH EAST
1A Pass 1A Pass
2A Pass 2C ?
What do you bid now?

Q. 3 - Both vulnerable, as South you hold:
AK9 CA2 Q763 AKQ8543

The bidding has proceeded:
SOUTH WEST NORTH EAST
1A Pass 1A Pass
2A Pass 2C ?
What do you bid now?

Q. 4 - Both vulnerable, as South you hold:
AAKQ852 Q92 Q104 A7

The bidding has proceeded:
SOUTH WEST NORTH EAST
1A Pass 1NT Pass
What do you bid now?

Q. 5 - Both vulnerable, as South you hold:
AK98 QJ745 Q82 AAQJ9

The bidding has proceeded:
NORTH EAST SOUTH WEST
1A Pass 1A Pass
2A Pass 2C ?
What do you bid now?

Q. 6 - Neither vulnerable, as South you hold:
AK98 QJ745 Q82 AAQJ9

The bidding has proceeded:
NORTH EAST SOUTH WEST
1A Pass 1A Pass
2A Pass 2C ?
What do you bid now?

UNRWA HQ AMMAN
VACANCY NOTICE NO. 60/95
THE UNITED NATIONS RELIEF & WORKS
AGENCY FOR PALESTINE REFUGEES IN
THE NEAR EAST REQUIRES AT ITS
HEADQUARTERS IN AMMAN:

SECRETARIES, GRADES 07-11.
VN#HQ(A)-60/95
FIXED TERM THREE YEARS

Monthly take home for grade 07 (JD245), grade 08 (JD266), grade 09 (JD 289), grade 10 (JD312), grade 11 (JD339); plus monthly provident fund for grade 07 (JD59), grade 08 (65), grade 09 (JD70), grade 10 (JD76), grade 11 (JD82) payable at end of service; plus dependency allowance; compulsory medical insurance.

REQUIREMENTS: Full secondary education; completion of a post secondary secretarial course of at least one year's duration; excellent typing and Word Processing skills, ability to operate PC applications such as Word Perfect, WinWord, Paradox, Lotus, Quattro Pro; at least 5 to 11 years' experience in secretarial work; fluency in English and Arabic. Excellent knowledge of the professional aspects of work are required, preferably gained at work in an international organization.

N.B.: External candidates who applied before and were invited for a test or interviews are requested not to apply again; candidates should mention on their application for which GRADES they wish to be considered.

Interested candidates should submit applications on **UNRWA Personal History Forms** not later than 20 January 1996 to:

The Office of the Coordinator
Attn: Personnel Officer
UNRWA Headquarters Amman
P.O.Box 140157 (Wadi Seer)
Amman 11814 Jordan.

UNRWA welcomes applications equally from men and women. Full consideration will be given to disabled candidates whose disability does not mitigate the effective performance of the duties of the job.

Priority will be given to fully qualified, registered Palestinians.

INTER-CONTINENTAL JORDAN

Christmas Eve Dec 24th
Our chefs have been working hard to make your Christmas Eve an unforgettable experience. Colourful menus and live entertainment will guarantee you and your family a fantastic celebration.

Christmas delights abound with a gourmet Four Course dinner. JD 15+ With lively entertainment.

Mama Jananita Dec 24th the bar will be offering a complimentary snack buffet from 7:00pm-9:00pm. The season to fiesta is now at Mama Jananita's bar.

Okaz Christmas Buché Glacé au Pernod and other Christmas delights are just some of the treats awaiting you. The traditional Christmas four course menu at the Okaz Restaurant also makes a hearty JD 15+.

Bukhara Enjoy the exotic le carte menu prepared by Indian chefs.

For more information call 611361 ext. 5

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NATO slams shooting at U.S., British aircraft

SARAJEVO (R) — U.S. and British military aircraft were reported on Saturday to have come under fire in Bosnia, the first open challenge to NATO's determination to go anywhere since it took over from the U.N. earlier this week.

A NATO spokesman said a U.S. transport plane carrying U.N. humanitarian aid to Sarajevo and a British helicopter ferrying two sick children to the capital were fired at from the ground on Friday.

Lieutenant-Colonel Mark Rayner described the attacks as "callous, cynical and ill-disciplined," adding: "This type of incident is quite unacceptable."

NATO Commander Admiral Leighton Smith said he held all the warring parties responsible for the incidents, and added: "Knock the shooting off. It's stupid."

Saying he expected the shooting would be passed off by the parties as a "celebratory fire," he dismissed such a practice as the mark of an undisciplined army and warned all sides to stop it before NATO forces retaliate.

A U.S. C-130 transport was hit by a single small arms round while approaching Sarajevo airport, but no-one was injured and the plane landed without interruption to the aid airlift that has kept the people of the besieged capital alive.

The aid airlift to Sarajevo's 350,000 inhabitants has frequently been suspended by shooting incidents, the worst in September 1992 when an Italian aid plane was shot down approaching Sarajevo, killing its four crew.

Also on Friday a British Sea King helicopter evacuating two sick children from the north Bosnian city of Tuzla to Sarajevo for medical treatment came under fire both on the outward and return journey around Visoko, just north of Sarajevo, but was not hit.

"During the flight the doctor informed the crew of the deteriorating condition of one of the babies, a two-day-old child, and the captain elected to fly direct to Sarajevo and cross the (war-time) confrontation line," Mr. Rayner told reporters.

He said six bursts of small arms fire, accompanied by tracer fire, were directed at the helicopter, which was not hit. A further 20 rounds of tracers were fired at it on return, after taking the babies to hospital.

The incidents were the first reported violations of a ceasefire in Bosnia that has largely held for some two months, and the first direct challenge to NATO's declared freedom of movement throughout Bosnia since it took over the peacekeeping baton on Wednesday.

The last shooting incidents in Sarajevo involved a few mortar rounds fired into the city centre coinciding with the signing of the Bosnia peace agreement in Paris on Dec. 14.

These attacks, which caused no injuries, were thought to have been the work of Bosnian Serbs who object to the treaty, particularly a clause bringing Serb-held areas of Sarajevo under Muslim-Croat government rule.

In Tuzla, the main base for some 20,000 U.S. soldiers

joining the 60,000-strong peace force, the troops have threatened to fire back if local people shoot in the air on Christmas eve.

A statement from the Tuzla press centre said a U.S. army delegation urged local officials to appeal to the citizens to refrain from firing celebratory shots in the air, a traditional part of merry-making in Bosnia.

"Our soldiers perceive it as a hostile act," the statement said. "We don't want them to suffer any unnecessary stress. Please do everything you can to stop it, otherwise we'll have to respond."

In Zagreb, the Croatian parliament's deputy speaker defended his country's human rights record Saturday, a day after a blistering attack by U.N. Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali.

Vladimir Seks, who is regarded as a close ally of President Franjo Tudjman, told a Zagreb daily that Croatia was "ahead of many countries on respecting human rights."

Dr. Boutros-Ghali stated Friday he was disturbed by abuses of Croatia's Serb minority and a failure to prosecute those responsible for hundreds of killings and arson attacks.

The U.N. Security Council also voiced "grave concern" that Zagreb had refused to lift deadlines given for Serbs who fled the offensives to reclaim their property, or risk losing it.

In an interview with the *Vecernji List* newspaper, Mr. Seks said minorities were not only "individually protected like all other Croatian citizens," but also treated as a "group" in terms of their

cultural and political rights. Croatian Serbs rose up in 1991 and seized three portions of the country. Many of the rights abuses detailed in Dr. Boutros-Ghali's report arise from offensives in May and August to take two of those areas.

U.N. military observers have been told of hundreds of instances of harassment and intimidation of Serbs by soldiers, police and Croatian civilians, some in paramilitary garb.

"There is a problem with the Serb minority, of which a large number have entered into open and armed secession from Croatia. It is therefore logical that they cannot hope to have favourable treatment compared to other minorities," Mr. Seks said.

Meanwhile Saturday, the archbishop of Zagreb, Cardinal Franjo Kuharic, urged all victims of ethnic cleansing in the former Yugoslavia — including Croatian Serbs — to return home.

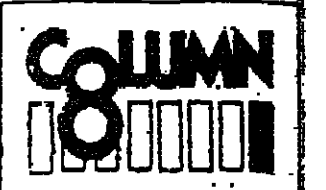
In an interview with Zagreb's independent Radio 101, he sent a Christmas message to all those, "regardless of where they are from, who were chased from their birthplaces and have had no guarantees of return."

"The Croatian Serbs must return, but also must recognise Croatia as their country," he said.

"The Church has repeated many times that it condemned acts of hate or vengeance against the Serbs of Croatia. These people have their homes and possessions, and their departure does not deprive them of their rights to recuperate these possessions," Mr. Kuharic said.



A worker adorns a Christmas tree with tinsel on Sarajevo's main street Saturday as pedestrians gather to watch the spectacle. The Bosnian government formally announced the end of its state of war last night as Sarajevo prepared for its first Christmas in an era of peace (Reuters photo)



Spain's X'mas lottery smiles on Majorca

MADRID (R) — Spain's Christmas lottery smiled on the island of Majorca Friday with a first prize of 35.1 billion pesetas (\$283 million) divided among 117 tickets. The winning number was bought in a working class district some 10 kilometres from the centre of Palma De Majorca. It was the first time the Christmas lottery prize, known as "El Gordo" (the Big One), had gone to Majorca since 1902. There were 117 series of the winning number sold and each ticket costing 3,000 pesetas (\$24) received a prize of 300 million pesetas (\$2.4 million). A second prize paying 144 million pesetas (\$1.2 million) to each winning ticket went to a poor area of Hospitalet De Llobregat, near Barcelona. A third prize paying 72 million pesetas (\$580,000) was won in several different parts of Spain. Spain is among Europe's most fanatical lottery countries and the Christmas lottery this year was worth 162.2 billion pesetas (\$1.31 billion).

Gas pipeline threatened by old bombs

LONDON (R) — An underwater gas pipeline being built from Scotland to Northern Ireland is in grave danger from a huge cache of decaying wartime bombs dumped in the Irish Sea, Britain's Channel Four Television said. It said geologists had detected at least eight underwater explosions from the dump site and feared that work on the British gas pipeline had disturbed the area. Channel Four showed a clip from an underwater video film which it said showed there were bombs lying virtually next to the new pipeline. British gas declined to comment pending the results of a government investigation into the possible dangers. The planned route for the pipeline runs through an area six miles off the western Scottish coast known as Beaufort's Dyke, where just over a million tonnes of torpedoes, bombs and chemical weapons were dumped after World War II.

Centuries-old ban on marriages eased in S. Korea

SEOUL (AFP) — Thousands of South Koreans living in shadowy illegal marriages because their distant ancestors are of the same clan, will now be able to get their marriages legalised, newspapers reported here Saturday. The centuries-old ban, rooted in an interpretation of Confucianism, keeps a Kim of the same clan (forefather) marrying another Kim or a Lim marrying another Lim. It has resulted in scores of suicides, made a nightmare of trying to register children in school, divided families along generational lines and opened couples to blackmail. The Korea Times said that on Friday the supreme court posted regulations for the registration of clan marriages, following the passage of "Special Marriage Law" in the National Assembly. Conservative Korean Confucianists, whose lobby prevented passage of the law in the past, classify same-clan marriages as incest even if the couple are far removed in blood relationship. The Times quoted the new law as saying the court will register same-clan marriages for one year as of next Wednesday on presentation of documentary proof of cohabitation and that the couples are further removed than cousins.

Man jailed for transmitting AIDS

AENGELHOLM, Sweden (AFP) — A man from Ivory Coast was jailed for six years and fined 750,000 kronor (\$113,650) for transmitting the AIDS virus to several Swedish women, a court in Aengelhalm, southern Sweden, ruled Friday. The 37-year-old man, whose identity was not revealed, was sentenced in December 1994 by a court in Malmo, southern Sweden, to four years in jail for having had unprotected sex with women and not warning them he had been suffering from AIDS since August 1992.

Qatar says no change in its stand on GCC dispute

MUSCAT (Agencies) — Qatar said on Saturday it has not changed its stand in a Gulf Arab dispute after talks aimed at breaking Doha's growing isolation by angered neighbours.

"Qatar's stand is as it is and I do not want to comment further than the declared Qatari position in this issue," said visiting Qatari Foreign Minister Sheikh Hamad Bin Jassim Bin Jabr Al Thani.

He was speaking after talks with Oman's Sultan Qaboos Bin Said. Earlier on Saturday, United Arab Emirates President Sheikh Zaid Bin Sultan Al Nahayan received the minister in Abu Dhabi.

Both leaders were disappointed and angered when their Qatari counterpart, Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa Al Thani, refused to attend the closing session of the

annual Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) in Muscat Dec. 6.

Qatar took the embarrassing step to protest the method by which the alliance appointed Saudi national Jameel Al Hujailan as GCC secretary-general, dropping Doha's candidate.

The walk out has cost Qatar traditional support within the GCC by the UAE and Oman. Members Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Bahrain are often at odds with Doha.

Prior to the GCC fence-mending tour by the foreign minister, Qatar proposed the formation of a three-nation GCC committee to review the dispute and pledged to abide by its decision.

But Qatar also threatened to boycott all GCC and other Arab meetings if Mr. Hujailan is allowed to attend as secretary-general.

The Qatari foreign minister is also to visit Kuwait on Sunday before travelling to Egypt on Tuesday for a meeting of the Damascus Declaration, which groups Egypt, Syria and the GCC states — Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Oman and the UAE.

Sheikh Hamad had been due to visit Bahrain but officials there informed him he was not welcome.

It was not immediately clear if the foreign minister met former Qatari ruler Sheikh Khalifa Ibn Hamad Al Thani, who arrived unexpectedly in Abu Dhabi on Thursday after an exile of nearly six months in France.

Sheikh Khalifa was toppled on June 27 by his son, who cited growing economic problems in Qatar, a small OPEC oil producer but one of the biggest gas producers.

Shbeilat on hunger strike, wife says

By a Jordan Times Staff Reporter

AMMAN — While His Majesty King Hussein did not rule out, in his interview with the Qatari newspaper *Al Watan* published yesterday, the possibility of a Royal pardon for opposition figure Leith Shbeilat, if he is convicted of the charges levelled against him, the wife of the former Islamist deputy announced yesterday that her husband has gone on a hunger strike.

"The president of the Engineers Association has begun a hunger strike as of Monday Dec. 18," Reem Shbeilat said in a statement released to the press Saturday.

"We have only learned this from a friend of (Mr. Shbeilat) who visited him (in jail) Friday, Dec. 22," said Mrs. Shbeilat, adding that the "blackout" on news of the hunger strike shows that there has been no "respect for ethics (and) casts doubt and suspicion on the whole case."

Mr. Shbeilat, who was sentenced to life imprisonment in 1993 after being found guilty of charges of sedition but was released under a general amnesty issued by the King, was detained earlier this month on charges of slander against the King and the Royal Family.

Investigation of the case has not been finalised yet and no formal charges have yet been made against Mr. Shbeilat, who was denied bail.

In his interview with *Al Watan* (page 1), the King said Mr. Shbeilat's case was "legal and not political."

In her statement Sunday, however, Mrs. Shbeilat complained that the "government media" was presenting only the prosecutor general's "viewpoint" with all that entails in terms of "negative insinuations and the spread of untruths."

She claimed that the press is being forced to stick to the official view and the supporters of her husband are being subjected to enormous pressures.

Mrs. Shbeilat, who called on human organisations, deputies and professional unions to mobilise to examine the way in which her husband's case is being handled, urged the press not to succumb to pressure and to report the "truth."

Eritrea to release Yemeni prisoners captured on island

DUBAI (AFP) — Eritrea said Saturday it would release 195 Yemeni soldiers taken prisoner during a battle for a disputed Red Sea island, meeting one of Yemen's conditions for the opening of talks to resolve their weekend conflict.

"The Eritrean government has begun consultations with the International Committee of the Red Cross on how the Yemeni prisoners will be released," the foreign ministry said in a statement issued by the Eritrean embassy here.

Yemen has demanded the release of prisoners and the withdrawal of Eritrean troops from Hanish Al Kabir ahead of any negotiations on the status of the strategic island.

Eritrea captured Hanish Al Kabir, claimed by both countries, on Monday following a three-day battle during which nine soldiers were killed.

Its conciliatory gesture came as Ethiopian Foreign Minister Seyum Mesfin mediated between the two countries.

According to Sunday's edition of the independent *Yemen Times*, Mr. Mesfin has proposed a three-point plan involving the release of Yemeni prisoners to the Red Cross, the evacuation of the Hanish archipelago by both sides and arbitration by the International Court of Justice in the Hague.

The United States was backing the plan, the daily said.

Diplomats in Sanaa said Mr. Mesfin, expected in Asmara after visiting Sanaa, would return to Yemen in the next few days to hear his response to his proposals.

Eritrea demanded Friday that both sides withdraw their troops from the Hanish archipelago of nine islands before taking their dispute to international arbitration.

Yemen's Deputy Prime Minister Abdul Wahab Al Ansi said Saturday his country "accepts any mediation likely to resolve the conflict peacefully," but dismissed Eritrea's demand for international arbitration as playing for time and avoiding the problem.

Iraqi pilot defects to N. Iraq

ANKARA, Turkey (AP) — An Iraqi major defected Saturday, piloting a helicopter into an allied-patrolled zone out of Baghdad's reach, an Iraqi Kurdish group said.

Air force Maj. Imad Hamad Salman Al Dulaimi landed at the headquarters of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan in Irbil, the provincial capital of northern Iraq, it said. The Iraqi Kurdish group assured the pilot's safety and declared support for "opposition efforts to end dictatorship in Iraq."

There was no immediate comment from Baghdad.

The defection could carry an extra blow for Saddam because Al Dulaimi is a member of Iraq's largest Sunni Muslim tribe which in May

led riots against security forces. President Saddam Hussein, also a Sunni, counts on the Sunnis as his main power base.

The Eliot III helicopter flown by Mr. Al Dulaimi was based at the KI air base near Kirkuk, about 95 kilometres south of Irbil, the statement said.

Since the end of the Gulf war, a U.S.-led allied force has been enforcing a no-flight zone in northern Iraq to help protect 3.5 million Kurds in their semi-autonomous region.

A spokesman for the allied force at Turkey's Incirlik air base, Capt. Chester Curtis, said there was no immediate confirmation of the reported defection.

Mr. Al Dulaimi's tribe, believed to be one million-strong, was blamed for serious rioting in Al Anbar province in western Iraq in May. It started when security officers executed Mohammad Madhlum Al Dulaimi, an air force major general, for alleged plotting to kill the president.

President Saddam also has been hit by defections from his inner circle.

Lt. Col. Hussein Kamel Al Majid, President Saddam's former confidant and son-in-law, fled to Jordan with his wife in August. Gen. Al Majid was the architect of Iraq's weapons programmes. Also fleeing with them was Gen. Al Majid's brother and his wife, another of President Saddam's daughters.

Arafat enters Bethlehem

(Continued from page 1) Israel, which captured the West Bank including East Jerusalem in 1967, vows it will never cede any part of the city.

Bethlehem, just a few kilometres from Jerusalem, was a sea of Palestinian flags and Christmas decorations as the crowd which included local dignitaries and Church heads greeted the PLO leader in Manger Square.

Arafat flew by helicopter from Gaza to the town of Beit Sahour. Surrounded by Palestinian security men, he drove to nearby Bethlehem, where he was due to convene a meeting of the self-rule Palestinian authority late Saturday.

"This is a historic visit. It is

the first one of its kind in the history of Palestine," Mayor Freij said in a live broadcast on Voice of Palestine radio. Patriarch Michel Sabbah, head of the Catholic Church in the Holy Land, said: "This visit, coming on Christmas, means a lot to us Palestinian Christians."

Bethlehem, a town of 45,000 Palestinians, was the sixth in the West Bank to come under Palestinian rule after Jericho, Jenin, Tulkarm, Nablus and Qalqilya. Mr. Arafat's self-rule headquarters is in Gaza, handed over by Israel last year.

Mr. Arafat and his wife Suha, who arrived in Bethlehem with her five-month-old daughter Zahwa on Friday, are due to attend mid-

night mass in the Church of the Nativity on Sunday.

Officials expect about 50,000 people to join Mr. Arafat, a Muslim, in celebrating Christmas in the city which is about 60 per cent Muslim and 40 per cent Christian.

The Christian-born Suha lit the main Christmas tree near the Church of the Nativity on Friday night.

Palestinians sang and danced in the market place to celebrate Mr. Arafat's arrival and the absence of Israeli troops.

The black, white, red and green colours of the Palestinian flag, an outlawed protest symbol just two years ago, decked out the winding hillside streets leading to the square, eclipsing Bethlehem's traditional Christmas lights.

CENTRAL BANK OF NIGERIA PRESS STATEMENT ON ADVANCE FEE FRAUD SCAM

1. The Central Bank of Nigeria is very much concerned that in spite of the various efforts made in the past through press statements to combat the advance fee fraud/telex scam, it has continued unabated with increasing sophistication. The bank is also worried by the reckless abandon with which names of some top Central Bank of Nigeria officials are often fraudulently used by the fraudsters to lend credibility and respectability to the spurious transactions.
2. Given the frequency with which some gullible people still fall victims to the business scams, the Central Bank of Nigeria deems it necessary once again, to re-issue this press statement (first issued in 1991) to alert the international business community, of the increasing spate of the attempts by International Syndicate of Fraudsters to defraud them.
3. The fraudulent attempts take the form of circular letters, unauthenticated fax and telex messages relating to purported approved transfers of funds running into millions of U.S. dollars arising from alleged foreign contracts. The "business proposals" should ordinarily have put any respectable individual on inquiry. However, driven by greed and the urge for quick money, many have ignored the warning by the Central Bank of Nigeria. The authors of the circular letters who bear Nigerian names are part of an international syndicate who are out to dupe gullible overseas recipients which are themselves both villains and victims in bogus "business" deals.
4. The Central Bank of Nigeria, therefore, wishes, once again, to warn all recipients of such fraudulent letters, etc., that they do not emanate from the bank and that the bank has no knowledge or records, whatsoever, of the purported claims or transfers or even the related alleged contracts. Recipients should as such exercise caution and immediately contact their local law enforcement agencies or the International Police Organisation (INTERPOL) nearest to them in order to help track down the international crooks and swindlers.
5. The bank will not bear any responsibility for any loss sustained by any person or corporation that fails to heed this warning.

Central Bank of Nigeria,
Tinubu Square,
P.M.B. 12194,
Lagos, Nigeria